# THE ENGLISH OF THE PULPIT

LEWIS H. CHRISMAN

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# THE ENGLISH OF THE PULPIT

LEWIS H. CHRISMAN, A.M. LITT.D.

# THE ENGLISH *of the* PULPIT

By

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# FOREWORD

This book represents an effort to apply the principles of English Composition to the specific linguistic problems of the preacher. The fact that no volume in this field has appeared for over forty years may be some justification of the following chapters. Most of the material included in the work has at some time or other been given in lecture form. Where this has been the case there has been no attempt to modify the colloquial style of spoken discourse.

As the book represents the results of at least twenty-five years of study of the subject, its debt to the homiletical literature of the period is incalculable. There are, however, those to whom specific and grateful acknowledgment is due.

*The Macmillan Company:* The Gospel at Corinth, *Richard Roberts;* In Pulpit and Pew, *Nathaniel J. Burton;* The Prophetic Ministry for To-day, *Charles D. Williams;* The Art of Preaching, *Charles R. Reynolds Brown;* Ambassadors of God, *S. Parkes Cadman;* The Supremacy of the Spiritual, *H. A. Youtz;* The Building of the Church, *Charles E. Jefferson;* The New Greatness, *Frederick F. Shannon;* The Gospel of Good Will, *Wm. DeWitt Hyde;* A New English Grammar, *M. A. Leiper.*

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*The Pilgrim Press:* The Interpreter, *Washington Gladden.*

*Harcourt, Brace and Co.:* Best Sermons of 1924, *Joseph Fort Newton* (The Revealing Light, *W. Rus-*

*sell Bowie);* A Book of Prayers for Boys, *C. C. Clements.*

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*The Christian Century:* March 19, 1925, Sermon, Peter the Rock, *Francis J. McConnell.*

*George A. Gordon,* Sermon, Jesus and the Individual, preached Jan. 18, 1925.

*Yale University Press:* Yale Talks, *Charles Reynolds Brown;* A Voice from the Crowd, *George Wharton Pepper;* Art and Religion, *Von Ogden Vogt;* What is your Name?, *Charles Reynolds Brown.*

*The Century Company:* Freshman Composition, *Henry Burrowes Lathrop.*

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# THE ENGLISH OF THE PULPIT

# CHAPTER I

## THE ENGLISH OF THE PULPIT

Good English in the pulpit is not essentially different from what it is under other circumstances. There is no type of language which is set apart for use only in a sermon. The truth is that a professional pulpit vocabulary is a linguistic abomination and an impediment to public speaking. The laws of language which apply to the writing and speaking of the preacher are the same as those which are applicable to correct usage in general. But there are special reasons why the man of the pulpit should neglect no opportunity for the acquiring of a mastery of his mother tongue. The using of good English does not necessarily make an effective preacher, yet it cannot be denied that without a certain degree of skill in the use of language, no man can hope to discuss luminously and convincingly the fundamental truths which must be elucidated by the Christian minister.

More than one preacher has woefully handicapped himself by taking an erroneous attitude toward the language that he speaks. Occasionally we hear the statement: "I have no time to bother with my English; my business is to preach the gospel." It can be proclaimed in Gath and in the streets of Askelon that the man who pays no attention to his prose style will always be a bungler in the performance of the well-nigh stupendous task of preaching the gospel of the Son of God. If a speaker stresses what is said at the expense

of the way it is said, he has fallen into palpably false reasoning. A sentence devoid of a style was never spoken or written. We use words in order to communicate thought. DeQuincy has defined style as "the organ of thinking." Whatever an individual's attitude toward linguistic questions, he has a prose style. It may be strong or weak, clear or muddy, coarse or beautiful, soporific or inspiring, antagonizing or convincing. But no human being ever uttered a thought without expressing it in some style or other.

A style is not something which is hung upon the outside of a thought for decorative purposes. It is a part of the very warp and woof of the idea. That style is the best which most interestingly and effectively conveys the truth to those for whom it is intended. A good style is nothing more or less than the expressing of a thought in the right way. On one occasion after listening to an address, a man wished to tell the speaker that he had spoken exceptionally well. Instead, however, of saying something on the order of "You surpassed yourself to-night" or "That was the best speech that I ever heard you make," he said, "You spoke better than you mostly do." The person who received the doubtful compliment knew that the intentions of his friend were good, but the method of expression made the congratulations of rather dubious value. One of the most practical of the numerous texts in the field of English Composition [1] gives two examples of college students using the wrong style in petitions to the faculty. One, in asking an exemption from discipline ended, "Allow me this privilege, and I promise you that never again shall my young feet stray from the straight path of duty into the tangled

[1] Linn, "The Essentials of Composition," p. 96.

and thorny thicket of evil-doing." The other petition read as follows: "Like Jeffries at Reno, I find that when I buck the faculty I am up against a better man. If you will give me the benefit of the doubt this time, I will never get into the ring with your respectable body again." Both of the effusions were greeted with laughter and disregarded.

Different types of thought demand different forms of expression. In some instances the requirement is that a simple thought be expressed in plain language. Here we have an example from one of a series of sermons to young people:

> Bring your mind under control. Compel it to do things it does not want to do. Study the books which you do not like. Pick out the study which you like the least, and say: "I'll conquer you if it kills me." Compel your mind to pay attention. Do not let it catnap. Do not allow your thoughts to go wool gathering. Think of your mind as though it were your dog, and compel it to do what you say. If it runs off, say: "Come back here and pay attention." If it lies down, make it get up. It is a disgrace to grow up with an undisciplined mind, a mind that jumps round like a flea or a grasshopper, and never settles down to any serious mental work. A man ought to be ashamed of himself if he carries in his skull a flimsy, flabby brain which cannot read a book above the intellectual level of a primer. You never can read the great books unless you have a disciplined mind.[2]

The sub-title of the book from which this material is taken is "Messages to Big Boys and Girls." The

[2] Jefferson, "Under Twenty," p. 128.

underlying idea of the work is to teach the art of Christian living. The aim of the author is simply to help young men and women face the problems of life in the best way. Consequently there is no necessity of a subtle or involved style. The sentences are short and the vocabulary simple. It is also characterized by the use of "everyday" words of a type which are also certain to attract the attention of an American youth.

What might be termed a high simplicity is an outstanding characteristic of modern preaching. But this does not mean that the preacher of to-day should avoid fundamental issues. His task very often is to express the thoughts of the wise in the language of the simple. As he does this, he finds that the more subtle and profound the thought, the more difficult it is to put it into words.

In the next example we read several truths of far-reaching theological implications put into language entirely comprehensible to any one not afraid of the arduous labor of thinking:

> The truth seems to be that Peter had hit upon a principle of ecclesiastical, or social, dealing that he had learned from his Lord in personal activities: he that doeth the will shall know the doctrine. The path to individual salvation is not by endless debate. Out of actually doing the will of God comes the conviction as to the truth of God. Having seen the effects on the church itself of preaching the gospel to all men alike, Peter was not going to let a body of debating elders try the patience of God with a lot of wornout ecclesiastical mechanism. Peter's speech at Jerusalem is one of the great charters of Christian liberty: "God gave to the gentiles the Holy Spirit—

even as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith." Every word of this is the plain man's appeal to fact, an appeal which has arisen out of actual application of the gospel to gentile groups. Having seen God at Antioch, Peter drew the sensible but radical conclusion that God was not limited to Jerusalem.[3]

In the matter of language there is more than one road to any given goal. Dean Swift has epigrammatically defined style as "proper words in proper places," but no word is necessarily the proper word for every man under all circumstances. Buffon has said, "Style is the man himself." Although this sententious saying, like all aphorisms, sacrifices truth to brevity, it serves a useful purpose in stressing the personal element. No two individuals think exactly alike. Therefore no one can lay down an absolute standard of expression for everybody else. The simple matter-of-fact method of expression is the most typical of our generation, but now and then there looms above the horizon a speaker through whose utterance runs a vein of prose poetry. Sometimes those who prefer the less ornate diction will say: "I don't like embroidery; plain speech is good enough for me." Such a criticism does not necessarily indicate a vast amount of wisdom. Grace and charm of language are not defects but virtues. An evident striving after artificial beauty is, of course, obnoxious to the intelligent reader or hearer, but the power to clothe thoughts with the garments of loveliness is not to be minimized. Other things being equal, it adds to effectiveness in the pulpit. The following extract is from a sermon by a preacher

[3] Francis J. McConnell, Sermon, Peter the Rock, *Christian Century*, 378, March 19, 1925.

whose rich imagery and luxuriant phrasal beauty makes the reader think of the prose poetry of John Ruskin:

> And now, that home word "daughter," that bosom pressure word, "my child," had fallen from the lips of the greatest among the holy, and the purest among the great. It was like water to a dying wanderer perishing of thirst in the desert. It was like music falling from the battlements of heaven. What wonder words were these that fell upon her bleeding and broken heart: "Thy sins are forgiven thee. Go in peace." In that moment the flare of lightning passed away, the black cloud on the horizon dissolved, the last echo of the midnight storm and tornado was hushed, the sun shone forth and in her vision she saw her father and mother coming across the grass in the soul's summerland, to take her into their arms and whisper welcome and lead her up into the throne of mercy, not marble, the throne of love and not law. And when the Master spoke the word "forgiven" every wound was healed as she entered her paradise, and her hot desert became an Eden garden.[4]

Good diction whether ornate and poetic or simple and direct is easy to recognize. But many of those who would admit its value are impeded in the development of an effective prose style by their erroneous belief that a command of adequate language is dependent upon special talent or even genius. This idea has long since been exploded. Any person of average intelligence can learn to shape language to thought. The speaker who is handicapped by a lack of mastery of his mother tongue has simply failed to put forth a

[4] Hillis, "The Great Refusal," p. 188.

sufficient effort. Nowhere is hard work more fraught with results. Here, as everywhere else, the first requisite for progress is the will to improve. Power over words does not fall as the gentle rain from heaven. George Eliot once defined genius as "the capacity for hard work." Skill of speech only comes as the result of persistent labor, but given ordinary intelligence, results are sure to follow in proportion to the effort made.

It goes without saying that the man who stands in the pulpit must not play fast and loose with the ordinary usages of English grammar. It is true that once in a great while a man who has never entirely overcome his lack of early training in the art of accurate speech, has, on account of other qualities, attained high usefulness and recognition as a speaker. To discount a preacher because of a blunder in speech is an evidence of arrant pedantry. The story is told of a certain sister who kept a count of her pastor's grammatical errors by recording each mistake by means of a pinhole in a card which she kept in readiness. One Sunday the reverend brother lost his patience and pointing at his lynx-eyed critic said, "I see a woman who is going to hell through a pinhole." Most of us would waste little sympathy on the petty-souled individual who specializes in looking for mistakes. Yet as a rule there is no excuse for the preacher disgracing himself and humiliating his congregation by making errors, which in themselves are the hallmarks of illiteracy. The preacher who began a testimony with the words: "Brethren and sisters, the Lord has did wonderful things for me during the past year" did not reflect much credit upon himself. Whether they should do so or not, people judge us by our language. It

takes only a little study and effort to give a man the ability to avoid falling into gross illiteracies.

To-day English Grammar is a comparatively simple subject. A generation ago it was the fashion for a certain type of pedantic schoolmaster to try to bury English beneath all of the rules of the complicated Latin Grammar. A wider knowledge of the history of the English language has tended to eliminate this. The newer grammars are simple and sensible. The dogmatism which regarded all grammatical laws as fixed and immovable for time and eternity has fortunately almost disappeared. An exceptionally good grammar which appeared in 1923 contains these words: "Grammar is a changing science, for as usage changes, it must change." The grammar of one generation, then, will only in part serve as a guide to the next.[5] The man who is using a grammar that is more than ten years old should speedily procure a more modern version. At all events there is no reason whatever for any man who speaks to congregations Sunday after Sunday remaining in ignorance of the comparatively few fundamental requirements of English grammar.

The knowledge of grammar, important as that is, is by no means half the battle. I remember a college student who had had experience in hammering the rules of grammar into the craniums of children in rural schools. This young man was considerably more than willing to instruct the entire community in regard to the law as it was delivered once and for all to the saints, and others, in Harvey's Grammar, but when it came to formulating an English sentence his performance was pitiable. When we speak of a knowledge of grammar, we, of course, do not mean the mere ability to quote rules and diagram sentences, but also

[5] Leiper, "A New English Grammar," p. 4.

the power to speak correctly. There was a time in my own life when I was much puffed up over my ability to diagram. How proud I was that I could drive subjects and predicates and objects and modifiers into their respective pens! There was one stanza of Gray's "Elegy" which represented the pinnacle of proficiency in the gentle art of diagramming:

> Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
> The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear;
> Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
> And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Yet even the ability to wrestle with this combination did not prevent our going out into the wide, wide world saying "I seen it" or "I done it" or "He has went." One day while I was arguing with a teacher over the virtues and defects of geometry, I attempted to give the debate an emphatic close by saying, "Geometry never *done* me any good." "Grammar didn't either" was the gracious reply. But that day one boy learned a lesson in practical English which he never forgot.

But even a slavish obedience to grammatical law does not insure effective speaking. Other elements of style of the highest importance cannot under any circumstances be ignored. President Tucker says:

> The literary qualities of the sermon which are in demand are equally clear and simple. I would lay stress upon these three,—plainness, force and beauty.[6]

Dean Charles R. Brown of the Yale School of Religion[7] gives practically the same advice, substituting

[6] Tucker, "The Making and Unmaking of the Preacher," p. 105.
[7] Brown, "The Art of Preaching," p. 178 ff.

for "plainness" the more exact and widely used term "clearness." This brings us to a discussion of these chief elements of style. Some authors make many more divisions,[8] but these three characteristics can be made to include all others which might be mentioned. The discourse which possesses them will explain, convince and inspire. The preacher who has acquired them has mastered no insignificant part of the art of preaching.

[8] Phelps, "English Style in Public Discourse."

## CHAPTER II

### CLEARNESS

No matter what other virtues it may possess, a sermon that lacks clearness has no excuse for existing. Bishop Quayle says: "Effective preaching I would define as the art of bringing men into the mood of God and keeping them there." [1] This, nevertheless, can be done only by the man who can put his thoughts into language which will be understood by his congregation. Obscurity and profundity are not synonymous terms. Speaking in unknown tongues is not a virtue in the modern world. A witty layman once described his pastor as one who could "dive deep, stay down long and come up dry." A preacher of whom these words could be truthfully said is a hindrance rather than a help in the upbuilding of the kingdom of the living God. It has been said that in the lectures delivered in the Lama Convents by Buddhist priests, the more obscure and unintelligible the utterance, the more sublime they are regarded. There are still instances of "words of learned length and thundering sound" being used to amaze and mystify the uninitiated. Some hearers are mightily impressed by a pretentious obscurity which is sometimes mistaken for profundity. A Presbyterian missionary in the Orient writes that according to the Arabic ideal of oral discourse, it should be composed in the most incomprehensible language because the less the hearers understand of it the more

[1] Quayle, "The Pastor-preacher," p. 83.

they admire it. In spite of the existence of gullible audiences, there is enough intelligence in the world today to make such a practice dangerous from the point of view of plain prudence. But more than this, the preacher, who, for the sake of making an impression of depth or learning, obscures his thought, is proving himself false to his fundamental obligations as a Christian minister. Clearness on the part of a preacher is more than a principle of discourse; it is a sacred duty.

The first requisite of clearness is the selecting of the right words with which to express the thought. Verbal exactness is a virtue which must be assiduously cultivated. Mark Twain speaks of using "the right word, not its second cousin." One of the sins committed against exactness is that of using a given word to convey too many different meanings. Dr. George H. Palmer makes this comparison:

> Like the bad cook, we seize the frying pan whenever we need to fry, boil, roast, or stew; and then we wonder why all our dishes taste alike while in the next house the food is appetizing.[2]

*Nice* is a word woefully sinned against by being used in divers meanings. A young girl, standing on the bridge above Niagara Falls, as she looked down upon the watery avalanche, was heard to give vent to her sentiments in the sentence, "Ain't it nice?" In regard to making exact distinctions, a study of synonyms is highly profitable. Words like *assert, claim, contend, declare, maintain, say, state* convey different shades of meaning. In a language as rich as the English, there is no excuse for working one defenseless word to

[2] Palmer, "Self-Cultivation in English," p. 21.

death. The person with limited vocabulary may use the word *look* under all circumstances. He may never dream of the array of substitutes. Among them are *glance, gaze, stare, peer, scan, scrutinize, gloat, glare, glower, lower, peek, peep, gape, con, pore* and *ogle.* Or possibly he should take a word from this group; *leer, view, survey, inspect, regard, watch, contemplate.* Here are a few verbs which, at the right time, should be used instead of walk: *step, plod, trudge, lumber, stagger, saunter, stroll, meander, pick, mince, roll.* Naturally one would not use the same one of these verbs to describe an old lady picking her way across a street on a wet day and a young couple strolling along a shady lane on a Sunday afternoon. If, in composing his famous "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," Gray, instead of saying "The ploughman homeward *plods* his weary way" had made the line read "The ploughman homeward *walks* his weary way," he would have obviously weakened the stanza, while the use of mince or some of the other approximate synonyms for *walk* would have made the poetry ridiculous. To find the exact word is never easy and this very fact makes the study of synonyms and antonyms imperative for him who would develop any degree of skill in the art of the exact use of language.[3]

A second impediment to clearness, due to a poor judgment in the selection of words, is the use of the ponderous Latin derivative. A recent magazine article contains the following:

> Is it possible to augment the objectivity and the versatility of the response of the individual mind to

[3] Lewis and Holmes, "Knowing and Using Words"; Greevor and Bachelor, "The Century Vocabulary Builder"; Allen, "Synonyms and Antonyms."

> life by cultivating the range, the plasticity, the inveteracy, and the intensity of the consciousness which the individual fastens on his own behaviour?

No doubt the author of these words had an idea in mind, but his choice of words is such that he conveys a thought to a relatively small number of his readers. Lord Brougham lays down a rule to which he makes no exception: "Always prefer the Saxon word." This dictum is obviously entirely too sweeping. There is a place for the Greek or Latin derivate. Unless it is a part of the vocabulary, the speaker may have to journey around Robin Hood's red barn in order to express a comparatively simple idea. It is, nevertheless, advisable to cultivate a vocabulary of plain, pithy Anglo-Saxon. A pure, racy energetic English is as suitable for public speaking as it is for table-talk. The preacher should not be afraid of everyday words.

There was a time when some speakers obscured their thought by the use of too many allusions to Greek and Roman mythology. This is one of the reasons why the sermons of Jeremy Taylor are to-day practically unreadable. Charles Sumner's senatorial addresses are weighted down with an erudite mass of classic lore. For high reasons this weakness is not an outstanding characteristic of our generation. Not many of us are in danger of becoming addicted to the bad habit of using too many classical allusions. There is, however, a similar fault which has not yet perished from the earth. The mystifying of a congregation by speaking in a technical philosophical language is a gross violation of sound homiletics. It is an error against which the young preacher must carefully guard himself. George Brimley, librarian of Trinity College, Cambridge, thus discourses on the nature of poetry:

> A poetical view of the universe is an exhaustive presentation of all phenomena, as individual phenomenal wholes, of ascending orders of complexity, whose earliest stage is the organization of single co-existing phenomena into concrete individuals, and its apotheosis the marvelous picture of the infinite life, no longer conceived as the oceanic pulsation which the understanding called cause and effect.[4]

These words may mean something. In all probability they do. Yet as they stand, they make as much sense read backwards as forwards. This is, to be sure, an extreme instance, but it represents a type of error which has not yet perished from the earth. On one occasion an eloquent preacher after announcing his text began his sermon with these words: "Are ideas innate?" "Correlative," "a priori," "transcendental ego," "categorical imperative" are a few of the terms which I remember hearing in a sermon to a congregation of average men and women. The stressing of the necessity of clearness in the vocabulary does not mean that the preacher must invariably adapt his speech to the most immature intellect in it. I once heard a venerable brother mercilessly criticize his pastor for using the word "pessimist." It is safe, though, for the man in the pulpit to make a real effort to speak a language that those who sit before him in the pews can understand. If he fails to do this, he is not measuring up to his highest opportunity.

Another sin against clearness is the badly constructed sentence. Upon this rock many a noble ecclesiastical craft has split. Dr. Dale of Birmingham used to tell of a preacher whose sermons consisted of a conglomeration of interminable sentences, each "sprouting

[4] Quoted from Phelps' "English Style in Oral Discourse," p. 131.

out into joint after joint and never ceasing to grow until for some inexplicable but beneficent reason he finally said, Amen." Freeman, the English historian, compressed his theory of the art of writing into one succinct statement: "Tell them to write short sentences." Father Edward Taylor, famous in the history of New England Methodism, was very much inclined to use long, unwieldy sentences. Now and then, when he would become hopelessly involved, he would give up the struggle and say, "Brethren, I have lost the subject of this sentence, but bless the Lord, I'm on the way to Heaven." Not every one, however, can extricate himself so skillfully. Many a budding orator has had the mortifying experience of discovering himself suddenly engaged in a wrestle with an unmanageable sentence. Boldly he girds himself for the fray, while the congregation sits with bated breath. Valiantly does he struggle and finally, flushed with victory, he proceeds upon his triumphant journey, leaving the poor sentence wounded and bleeding by the wayside. Such blood-curdling adventures can easily be avoided by the cultivation of a more direct style.

The study of a random paragraph from Charles E. Jefferson's "The Building of the Church" has an educational value in the important art of making sentences:

> A man who thinks and works and grows is always interesting. The secret of an extended pastorate is a growing man. Young men are sometimes daunted by the fact that all the truths of Christianity are wrinkled and gray-headed. The Christian preacher is ordained for the proclamation of commonplaces. Brotherhood and service, love and forgiveness, hope and mercy, who can make these verbal bones live?

> Only a living soul can do it. A man half dead cannot do it. A man with a shrivelled heart cannot do it. Only a man in whom Christ dwells richly can give sparkle to the trite, and immortal freshness to things that have lost their bloom.[5]

These sentences have the merit of brevity. They are, moreover, definite. They do not trail off into nothingness. There is no conglomeration of qualifying clauses between the subject and predicate. Some would write the second sentence in the above example in this way, "The secret of an extended pastorate, in case circumstances permit a preacher to have a long term of service, is a growing man." Many a misshapen sentence has been due to the inclusion of modifying material in order to save the tender sensibilities of some hard-headed old ram of the flock. This is illustrated by the story of the preacher who, fearing to lose his negative popularity, thus mitigated the doctrine of the scripture: "Brethren, you must repent as it were; and be converted in a measure; or you will be damned, to some extent." It is the business of the preacher to speak the truth in sentences which go straight to the mark. The study of plain technique of the English sentence can add mightily to the power of the Christian pulpit.[6]

In addition, there can be no clarity unless the substance of a sermon is well organized. A congregation will, now and then, show commendable patience, but intellectual hash is poor nourishment for the saints. Thoughts combined in a hit-or-miss, higgledy-piggledy, topsy-turvy fashion are not worth the time and attention of busy men and women. The man who

[5] Jefferson, "The Building of the Church," p. 298.
[6] See Appendix 3.

starts his mouth going and then walks away and leaves it will always have to depend upon the patience, or the possible stupidity, of his hearers. The best models in existence of ideally organized material are found in an old volume written by a gentleman who bore the name of Euclid. I know of one preacher who works through several propositions in geometry every week in order to keep the loins of his mind well girded. Needless to say, his sermons are models of well-knit logic. Grapplings with fundamental philosophy and theology may serve the same purpose.

Another way of accomplishing this object is to study authors who have displayed skill in the art of organizing material. One of these is Edmund Burke, whose marshaling of facts and conclusions shows a dialetic power which our generation bids fair to forget. If there were more study of Burke "On Conciliation," there would be less flabby thinking. Another outstanding master of logical arrangement is Abraham Lincoln.[7]

In his address delivered at Cooper Union in New York on February 27, 1860, the processes of reasoning are as evident as the steps in a proposition of geometry. Lincoln had what Rufus Choate called "the instinct for the artery;" consequently, he had the power to brush away extraneous matter and come directly to the point. This is especially apparent in his letters to General McClellan and Horace Greeley. A study of material of this kind is exceptionally helpful in developing the power of clear, straight thinking.

Good organization does not mean over-organization. A speaker in an effort for logical arrangement can stand so straight that he leans backward; he can refine

[7] Prince and Chrisman, "Selections from Lincoln."

and quibble until he loses both himself and his congregation. One way to avoid this is by not attempting to say too much in one address. Dr. John Watson (Ian Maclaren) in "The Cure of Souls" repeatedly stresses the value of having each address "one crisp, clean-cut, complete idea." In amplifying this idea he makes the following observations:

> There are three degrees—the preacher below par, who can speak for an hour without a single idea; the preacher above par, who will charm us for an hour with a coruscation of ideas; and the preacher just at par, who does his duty in something less than forty minutes by one distinct idea.[8]

Of the three the last is generally to be preferred. One idea properly amplified furnishes sufficient material for a real sermon. I once heard a sermon which contained fourteen heads, all of which were duly labeled from "firstly" to "fourteenthly." The natural result was that most of the congregation forgot all of the points. It is altogether probable that some of the divisions of this sermon could have been included in others. It is, moreover, entirely probable that such a large number of topics included some which were but remotely related to the subject of the discourse. A sermon should not only have one predominant thought, but the material should be arranged in such a way as to make it almost impossible for the hearer to miss it. Bishop McConnell tells of an[9] acute student who especially enjoyed listening to the lectures of Josiah Royce. According to this listener, Royce dealt with one theme in such a way that his progress

[8] Watson, "The Cure of Souls," p. 19.
[9] McConnell, "The Preacher and the People," p. 51.

"had something of the circular scouring swing of a rising flood of waters which advances with a whirl rather than with direct attack." The result of this method was that those who did not at first comprehend the speaker could "catch him" as he swung round again. All the bricks in a wall can not be touched with a breath. Not every problem of the universe can be settled in one sermon. The preacher who in thirty minutes conveys to the minds and hearts of his hearers one definite mind-gripping, soul-inspiring idea has done a worth-while piece of work.

If a sermon is a genuine unit, its outline is comparatively simple. In Ian Maclaren's "Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush" we read of how there came to the kirk in Drumtochty, a clerical brother who, according to Elspeth Macfayden, prize "sermon taster" of the Glen, preached a sermon of "seventy heads, countin' p'ints." This experience suggests the boy who upon being asked by his teacher whether he would prefer eight sixteenths of an apple or a half expressed a strong preference for the half. When he was asked to explain himself he replied, "If an apple is cut into eight sixteenths, most of the juice would be lost."

A simple outline with the points logically arranged always militates in favor of clearness. Two examples must serve at this stage of the discussion:[10]

> The Blind Spot. (Having no part dark. Luke xi, 36.)
>
> Introduction. Many are wholly blind concerning spiritual realities, and many believers see only imperfectly, intermittently, partially. Of these latter we now propose to speak. We notice:

[10] See Chapter V.

I. The fact of this partial appreciation of divine truth.
   1. Limitation due to doctrines held by various believers.
   2. Limitations due to erroneous conceptions of duty formed by various believers.
II. Causes of partial illumination.
   1. Pride.
   2. Insincerity.
   3. Disobedience.
III. Evils of defective enlightenment.
   1. It destroys peace.
   2. It maims character.
   3. It implies peril.[11]

Unto the Hills. (I will lift up mine eyes to the hills. Psalm cxx: 1.)

Introduction. I suppose everybody has a sort of hill-country in his life. I mean that in every lot there is a place where indifference rises into desire, a place where the dead level of monotonous concern towers in aspiration and ambition.

I. The hill of Sinai.
II. The hill of Calvary.
III. The hill of Olivet.[12]

Both of these examples represent sermons built about one central idea. In each of them there is a comparatively simple outline. With such a direct line of reasoning, it would be rather difficult for the speaker to get lost "in the brush." In both of the discourses the skeleton is easy to discern. In "The Blind Spot" the headings are designated in such a way that no reader can miss seeing them. Some, with a certain

[11] Watkinson, "The Blind Spot and Other Sermons." Watkinson's own outline is used.
[12] Jowett, "God, Our Contemporary," p. 131.

degree of validity, object to the bones of a sermon being too conspicuous, but above everything else, the speaker must make his hearers understand him. If making his outline rather apparent serves this end, its prominence is justified. A good outline is a succession of milestones which point the road to a definite goal. Without such a goal and such a road, a preacher is liable to find himself fighting as one that beateth the air.

In summing up, it can be said that the three dominant factors in the attaining of the linguistic virtue of clearness are: the selection of words that are exact and clear; the proper construction of the sentence, and the logical organization of the material.

# CHAPTER III

## FORCE

Important as it is that a sermon should be clear, lucidity is not the only linguistic virtue which it must possess. A discourse might, at the same time, be clear and ineffective. There can be clearness without vigor. This invariably means commonplaceness and lack of dynamic power. Consequently it is imperative that the virtue of forcefulness must also be cultivated. Some words are weak and colorless; others are strong and vivid. A sentence may emit a few gentle purrs or it may crack like a whip. A sermon may sprawl or march. It can be a soporific or an inspiration.

It was said of Napoleon that his words were half battles. The vocabulary of the forceful writer thrills with a radiant strength. Dr. George H. Palmer [1] says that an adequate vocabulary is characterized by accuracy, audacity and range. Of these, audacity is the most nearly synonymous with force. A timidity which sets a pedantic correctness "produces that peculiarly vulgar diction known as 'school-ma'am English' in which for the sake of dull accord with usage all the picturesque, imaginative and forceful employment of words is sacrificed." [2] The late Sam Jones could not in every way be helpful as a model of linguistic perfection, but he can teach us some potent lessons in vigorous audacity of speech. We have no reason to take exception to his statement when he says:

[1] "Self-Cultivation in English," p. 12.
[2] *Ibid*, p. 18.

> I think I owe my success as an evangelist to the fact that I have something to say and say it. I use plain Anglo-Saxon language. I don't say "decayed"; I say "rotten." I don't say "penetrate," but "pierce." I don't say "pandemonium" but "hell." I don't say "home of the good," but "heaven." And I always liken the fellow to the thing he is most like, whether he be like a hog, a dog, a fox, or a skunk."[3]

This is not exactly dainty or urbane, but it is decidedly robust.

But the question soon arises as to just how much liberty a person should allow himself in the use of words. Is slang permissible? Possibly it would be safest to lay down the general rule that slang is out of place in the pulpit. We must not, however, treat this question in too cavalier a fashion. It is true, as Dean Brown expresses it, that style "should be marked in the best sense by a natural beauty."[4] Many slang words have associations which cause them to detract from the impressiveness of any address in which they are used.

There is, nevertheless, something to be said on the other side. In one of the most stimulating of recent books dealing with the teaching of English we read the following:

> Some slang is coarse and vulgar, and many words in approved usage not slang at all, are coarse and vulgar; naturally one should avoid all such words, whether slang or not. But many words which we stigmatize as coarse are, in reality, strong, vigorous, direct, vulgar. "Beat it," "that's the limit," "I'm on to you," "punk," "swell," "swat," "scoot," are

[3] Quoted from Kelley's "Down the Road," p. 374.
[4] "The Art of Preaching," p. 183.

brusque, terse, forceful modes of expression; they are, to my way of thinking, better conversational English than their more staid and literary synonyms. "Cut it out" is more graphic than "eliminate it," "butt in" is more expressive than "intrude," "spill the beans" is more picturesque than "injure the cause." [5]

This does not necessarily mean that the use of such terms in the pulpit is to be recommended. Yet there is a danger that in our effort to avoid the incorrect and the coarse, we neglect the vivid, rich-flavored, full-blooded, emotion-laden vernacular.

There is much less fear of the vernacular than there was twenty-five years ago. With the development of a simple, direct, vital style of expression has come a spirit of defiance of the pedant. Mr. Mencken [6] points out several interesting locutions in the writings of such a precise stylist as Woodrow Wilson. Among them are these: *"We must get a move on, hog,* used as a verb, *gum-shoe,* as an adjective and *that is going some.* The same distinguished writer has also used *butting in, the whole thing,* and *up to me.* Lloyd George, during the World War, spoke of Russia as still *on the ropes* and of Germany's endeavor to put England *out of business.* Hugh Black has said "Nations can have *swelled heads* as well as men."

There is, to be sure, a grave danger of sinning on the side of ultra-freedom but this tendency among certain classes like preachers and teachers is less marked than its opposite. I once heard a public speaker apologize for saying "on the rocks," when the

[5] Barnes, "The New Democracy and The Teaching of English," p. 39.
[6] "The American Language," p. 36.

phrase exactly expressed his thought. On another occasion I heard a woman sneer at a speaker because he used the fine, picturesque, Rooseveltian term *pussy-foot*. This phrase, comparing a super-prudent speaker to the cautiously stepping "tiger of the house," is one of the best descriptive terms in the English language. It can be said with a high degree of assurance that fewer addresses have been injured by a daring independence than have been made dull, pokey and lifeless by an old-maidish preciosity.

In the two following examples from sermons by one of America's outstanding preachers, we come into contact with a racy, epigrammatic, audacious, effective English:

> The odds were against him—it would have taken a strong moral nature to have faced that combination of circumstances successfully, and this young fellow had not the necessary stuff in him to do it. He fell down. He wasted his substance in riotous living. He made friends with men who were bad and with women who were worse. He went the pace and it was rapid. He thought he was having the time of his life—in his poor silly little head that was all he knew. But he soon came to the end of his time, such as it was—he bumped his way down the cellar stairs until he found himself at the bottom. "He had spent all and he began to be in want." He took out his purse and there was nothing in it—not a sou. And just there "he came to himself." He began for the first time to get his bearings. He saw the value of an empty purse.[7]

> Here in that region east of Suez "where there ain't no ten commandments and the best is like the

[7] Brown, "Yale Talks," p. 25.

> worst," was a certain king who regarded himself as the top of the heap. . . . He had just won a notable victory over his enemies and he celebrated by setting up in Babylon a golden image ninety feet high and eighteen feet broad. He called upon the people of his realm to fall down and worship the image. He coupled with that call to worship the stimulating announcement that if any man refused he would be cast into a furnace of fire. . . . When we are in Babylon we must do as the Babylonians do. We cannot afford to be narrow and provincial. With a golden image ninety feet high, with the king leading off in the worship and all the presidents and princes and other "big bugs" following suit, what could any plain man do but conform? He would be a fool for his pains to stand out against all that.[8]

Such sentences pulsate with life. They have the tang of reality. They are not mere conglomerations of inherited, threadbare phrases. English of this type is disappointing to the brother who cannot think of Christianity apart from the "dialect of Zion" which his grandfather rolled under his tongue as a sweet morsel. But as a rule, men and women are not especially influenced by the worn-out terminology of a vanished generation. A professional pulpit vocabulary is invariably a hindrance to the man afflicted with it. People of sense do not go to church to hear nothings expressed in terms of cant. The language of yesterday does not meet with a response from the sons and daughters of to-day. A text-book in psychology written fifty years ago impresses the reader of this generation as being in another language. Sermons couched in the verbiage of 1850, or of 1880, do not

[8] Brown, "What Is Your Name?" p. 43.

grip the modern mind and heart. A clericalism detached from life is always a bane. A professional vocabulary incomprehensible to all except those living intellectually in the early part of the last century is most emphatically an impediment to the progress of the kingdom of God. Men must be addressed in language which hits the mark.

There are certain hackneyed expressions of another type which invariably militate against force. Some of them *"one hundred per cent American, red-blooded men, a regular fellow, live wires, good mixers, a good sport* are hall-marks of a limited vocabulary. They were ready for the discard twenty years ago. Current slang, for the most part, consists of jejune expressions which are frequently used as a substitute for colorful, picturesque language. Vivacious, original slang is a part of the joyousness of life, but lazy slang is simply the retailing of second-hand catch-words. It is pathetic rather than vivid. For example, *four-flusher, the big idea, I wouldn't put it past him* or *guy, boob, fish, dumb-bell,* as words of blame are all terms out of which the vitality is almost entirely gone. Another type of linguistic insipidities consists of expressions like *briny deep, hoary head, single blessedness, the blushing bride, the happy pair, poor but honest, pearly teeth, golden locks, launched into eternity, reign supreme, sadder and wiser* and scores of others. Of course, many of these words and phrases would have a hard time to find their way into a sermon, but each one of us is apt to have, in some form or other, his own little collection of hackneyed terms. The effective speaker must remember that words like everything else become worn out and shabby. Yet, in the long run, the effectiveness of a sermon depends upon the

use of a living English through which the truth can blaze. A man's vocabulary either strengthens or weakens every sentence that comes from his lips.

Force is also determined by the structure of the sentence. There is a tradition that one of the old time grammars admonished us that "a preposition should never be used to end a sentence with." The modern linguist is not quite that arbitrary in regard to the terminal preposition, but as a rule this part of speech furnishes a slovenly and weak climax to any sentence. It should be tabooed at least nine times out of ten. In this sentence we have the prepositional ending at its worst: "What did you bring me that book to be read to out of for?"

The edict of the grammarian against the preposition at the end of the sentence is based upon the indubitable principle that the strong, emphatic, meaningful words should round out the expression of the idea. That which one wishes to emphasize should be placed at the beginning or end of the sentence. Words like *however, moreover, consequently* and *besides* should mostly be "buried" in the middle. A well-written sentence starts definitely and ends strongly. The less striking elements are not given the most conspicuous places. In this sentence the ending is weak: "He is deficient in arithmetic usually." But it can be very readily improved: "He is usually deficient in arithmetic." We next have a weak beginning: "So to speak, the curriculum is divided into three parts." It can easily be transformed as follows: "The curriculum is, so to speak, divided into three parts." A forceful sentence does not gradually grow dim and vanish. When it stops it stops. And it is likely to end with its most emphatic word.

The heaping up of phrases or clauses is not only an impediment to clearness but also to vigor. Most of us are not able to compress the entire wisdom of the universe into a single sentence. Every epigram must sacrifice comprehensiveness to emphasis. There is no excuse in the world for a speaker's playing havoc with his ideas in order to avoid the quibbling of some infinitesimal-souled word-monger. Most effective sentences do not contain more than one subordinate clause. It is very seldom that we find strength in a sentence without compactness.

Force in style is never the result of loud shouting or extreme statements. "Don't scream, Sammy," was the exhortation of Wesley to one of his preachers. His dictum is still good advice and in many instances sorely needed advice. In Hamlet's directions to the players at Elsinore there is a sound philosophy of public speaking which every generation of public speakers needs to keep in mind: " . . . for in the very torrent, tempest, and, I may say, the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to see a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to a tatters to split the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise." Vociferousness is not eloquence. George Henry Lewes once remarked, "I boil at low temperature." "That," retorted Huxley, "is a sign of a vacuum in the upper regions." The speaker who "tears a passion to a tatters" either has a woeful lack of self-control, or else he is endeavoring to make an impression upon the uninitiated who confuse noise with light.

Unmeasured language impresses the modern audi-

ence as "sound and fury signifying nothing." Years ago a preacher wrote these words in his diary: "It has seemed to me to-day that my depravity is more profound than that of Satan himself." A few days later he thus expressed himself: "At a recent date I recorded that my depravity seemed more profound than that of Satan. To-day I feel like asking pardon of Satan for making the comparison." I have heard men speaking in old-fashioned testimony meetings of their former iniquity and present beatitude in such a way as to make one believe that if they were telling the truth about the sins of their unregenerate days, they had committed crimes for which they should at that very moment have been in jail. They were very probably not telling the truth. Statements so extreme that they are false are not effective under any circumstances. I rather recently heard a country preacher denouncing the heretical doctrines which he said were taught in the modern college. He eventually shrieked out the information that "most professors are on the way to hell and are taking their students with them." A few of his congregation may have been impressed. Of the rest, some cynically smiled and others looked mortified. Rant is never force.

A speaker, or writer, can add to his forcefulness by practicing certain principles of English Composition, but the roots of power are deeper than that. Force on the platform is the outgrowth of a vigorous, fearless personality. The man who has read Emerson's "Self-Reliance" and applied its teachings to his life will utter words which can stand up straight. As a man is, he speaks. Strong sentences are the result of vigorous thinking. A man hedged in by all sorts of

"Miss Nancy" conventionalities can not utter words that hit the mark like well-aimed bullets.

In the following sentences we have an example of trenchant, convincing, speech. Its power is not a matter of rhetorical skill, for the careful reader can note some deficiencies in composition. The author brings out his idea with more than usual forcefulness because his heart thrills with a deep conviction and a genuine moral passion:

> Frivolity has its roots in a hereditary love of excitement. . . . There is good in all. It is better to be excited than to be depressed; it is better to be on the move than to sit still and mope. But when there is so much suffering to be relieved, so much knowledge to be acquired and diffused, so much wrong to be righted, so much sympathy needed, it is a burning shame that at the end of the day, the week, the month, the season, any man or woman should have to show as good accomplished only so many luncheons and dinners eaten, so many cards shuffled, so many miles travelled. . . . The gospel has not been preached as it should be until every one within hearing has been made thoroughly and heartily ashamed of indulging for themselves or tolerating for their children a life of meaningless excitement, with its inevitable cost and counterpart of strength and steadiness undeveloped, duties undone, services shirked and opportunities thrown away.[9]

The next specimen is also taken from a volume of lectures to preachers. It represents a more finished English, but in its eloquence there is no effete word-

[9] Hyde, "The Gospel of Good Will," p. 63-64.

mongering, no candied prettiness, no dilettante ineffectuality. Sylvester Horne's words are potent because they are fired with the glow of a mighty enthusiasm:

> The time has surely come to sound another note. Who should be proud of their calling if not we? What other history has ever equalled ours? Think of the procession of the preachers! No range of mountains has been high enough to stay their progress; no rivers deep and broad enough to daunt them; no forests dark and dense enough to withstand their advance. No poet has ever sung the epic of their sacrifices. Was ever such romance? Was ever love exalted to so pure a passion? Was ever the human soul so unquenchable a fire? Silver and gold they had none. Such as they had they gave. The alms they distributed were faith, hope and love. Wherever they went they trod a pilgrim road, and flung forth their faith. Often to a skeptical and scornful generation. But what heeded they? They passed onward from frontier to frontier, "the legion that was never counted," and let us add, that never knew defeat. Gradually before their message, ancient pagan empires tottered, heathen despots bowed the head, in the lands of Goth and Vandal stately cathedrals reared their splendid towers and spires, and the battle music of the Christian crusade rang triumphantly in chiming bells and pealing organs over conquered races.[10]

Sentences with such a pulsating strength deal in concrete words with concrete issues. Anemic words which mean nothing accomplish nothing. The making

[10] Horne, "The Romance of Preaching," p. 46-47.

of a sentence that is built so that it can carry the weight of a big truth is a task worthy the highest powers of any man. To speak words that shall turn the thoughts of men to the reality of the invisible calls for knowledge, power and vision.

# CHAPTER IV

## BEAUTY

No one would dispute the statement that a sermon should be clear. Very few would minimize the value of force. But when we come to beauty, the third member of the triumvirate of linguistic virtues, there is another story. Some speakers who entirely lack it regard their deficiency as a merit and say: "I plant no flowers; I preach the plain old gospel." Others go even further and deliberately cultivate a crude bluntness. Sometimes this attitude is due to the natural tendency of humanity to justify its limitations. We under-rate that which we do not possess. The man who has no grace of style is inclined to sneer at phrasal beauty as verbal millinery. Other speakers have revolted against the artificiality which consists of stringing filigree phrases together and calling the result a sermon. But when all is said the preacher who can add beauty to the clearness and force of his language is more effective in his preaching of the living word.

Beauty is not necessarily ornament. It does not consist of figures of speech appended to prosaic sentences for decorative purposes. Charm of language is not external decoration. It is no more requisite to a style that is elaborate than it is to one that is simple. It means the elimination of stylistic blemishes and the obedience to certain positive laws of imagination and taste. A crude, harsh expression may offend the sensibilities of a hearer and distract his attention from

the idea which the speaker is trying to impress upon him. Beauty of expression means euphony of words and harmony of setting. It adds grace, dignity and reverence to a sermon. It helps to free the hearer from the superficial and the tawdry. Von Ogden Vogt says:

> The very essence of the thing that happens to people when they are impressed by beauty, either of nature or of art is increased vitality. They are literally remade, increased in strength of body and strength of mind.[1]

One hindrance is the harsh or jingling sound. Unconscious rhymes impair the effect of a sermon. A combination like "A man should try with all his might to do right," or "He began the day by kneeling down to pray," is liable to cause a grin to appear on the countenance of the ubiquitous individual whose volatile humor is more highly developed than his reverence. Hissing sounds, S, SH, Z, CH, ST, do not add to euphony. Tennyson called the elimination of them "kicking out of the boat the geese." Dr. Broadus objects to the phrase, "In Jesus' name" as having an unpleasant sound.

Amidst the mists
With stoutest boasts
He thrusts his fists
Against the posts
And still insists
He sees the ghosts.

The reading aloud of this stanza will speedily convince any one of the discord which comes from the repetition of certain sounds.

[1] Vogt, "Art and Religion," p. 28.

Another impediment to euphony is the too frequent repeating of a word in the same sentence or paragraph. This is sometimes hard to avoid. Occasionally clearness seems to demand it. There is also another reason. If we use a given word in one sentence, it is likely to reappear in the next. I once received a letter of less than a page in which *forceful* was used five times. This mistake is especially easy to make in rapid composition or in extemporaneous speech. For example:

> One form of house is one that stands up about four feet from the surface of the water.
>
> Many of the incidents are real, but those which are not are so cleverly woven into the real ones that we almost feel that the whole story is real.

Repetitions of this type are awkward and could be avoided. There are, nevertheless, cases where only certain words of specific and restricted meaning can be employed to express the idea. Under such circumstances to repeat is logical. Sometimes writers in endeavoring to avoid repetitions produce a strained and awkward effect. In oral discourse it is better to repeat than it is to halt or stumble. The rule against using a word more than once in a sentence or paragraph must be applied with discretion.

Beauty of expression is not simply the result of avoiding certain errors. It is something positive. It means a correspondence of sound and sense. It is also characterized by a rhythm of phrase and sentence. In prose as in poetry there is the element of rhythm. This is especially marked in Newman, Ruskin and Carlyle. It is in evidence in some of the sermons of Henry Ward Beecher. I go to a modern preacher for my illustration of this element:

> Nothing can make morning commonplace, though morning shall rise till all the suns be dead. I felt this timeless, changeless wonder of the dawn as I went out daily, a summer ago, into a world across which the morning was always unfolding its light-touched wings. The roads I traveled were an unforgettable part of my boyhood's earliest memory, the fields I passed were more familiar than anything else in the world. The sentinel pines, alien to the climate and the soil, still shadowing the roof which sheltered my youth, were landmarks against the sky. The dew-drenched goldenrod by the roadside, the ripening corn in fields beloved of old, touched all the foregrounds with well-remembered colours. The call of the quail and the braver note of the Kentucky cardinal, ruby red in the wayside growth, were like the music of a dream—and yet as the cool morning breeze blew up the valley and the sun drank up the mists and the world awoke, I heard such music as the statue of Memnon made when smitten by Egyptian dawns in immemorial Thebes, and saw along the low line of Ohio hills the same splendour as touches the changeless snows of the Bernese Oberland with rose and gold. . . . It is never commonplace—the day's awakening.[2]

In reading this passage aloud we notice a harmony of word and thought. The sentences flow along like a limpid river. Discordant syllables and words out of tune with the rest of the paragraph are not in evidence. The casual reader of these lines may not be able to explain his emotions but he receives something that would not come to him from Dr. Matter-of-fact's pellucid paragraphs or from the thunders of Brother Bombast's vociferated eloquence.

[2] Atkins, "The Undiscovered Country," p. 109-110.

Dr. Atkins' paragraph justifies a little additional analysis. It appeals to the imagination because it presents a picture. And this scene along the Ohio roadside is not drab and dull but richly colored. It is interesting to count the various color effects brought out by the author in less than thirty lines. Dr. Nathaniel Burton, Lyman Beecher lecturer for 1883, in his illuminating and richly human volume, "In Pulpit and Pew," gives two chapters to the imagination, one bearing the caption "Imagination in Ministers," and the other that of "Imagination in Sermons." He also devotes another lecture to the same general subject, "The Vague Elements in Language." The speaker with imagination says more than he really says. He has that rare power of unspoken suggestion. To some readers Dr. Atkins' description of an Ohio roadside brings pictures of other dusty country highways, of almost forgotten homesteads and perhaps of the well-loved faces of those whom here we see no more. Preaching is not proving theorems in geometry. It is not mere rationalizing. Language which is not illumined by the imagination may prove truths with syllogistic correctness, but it never fires the emotion.

Beautiful English can never emanate from the pen or the lips of a man without imagination. A sermon entirely devoid of the imaginative element will grovel rather than soar. In it truth is always clothed, not in the robes of light but in the garments of heaviness. A figure of speech, however, has beauty only when it is the best way of expressing a thought. What a wealth of verbal loveliness is to be gleaned from the pages of the masters of English prose. Dr. George A. Gordon begins a noble sermon [3] by quoting a num-

[3] Gordon, "Revelation and the Ideal," pp. 53-54.

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ber of impressive examples of figurative language. He speaks of Edmund Burke standing by the side of his dead comrade in a Bristol political campaign and saying, "What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue," of Carlyle speaking of Harriet Martineau's soul "as clean as river sand," and of his wife as being "rainbow to my dripping clay." Carlyle is especially rich in beautiful images. Dr. Gordon quotes three more from him. In one the Chelsea prophet speaks of his aged mother sinking in death "as the last pale sickle of the moon, sinking in dark seas." In another he says that the lines which John Sterling wrote him four days before he died "were written in star fire and in immortal tears." The third came to him as he rested in the evening by the Solway and saw in the "North an Aurora—footlights of this great theater of a universe where you and I are players for an hour."

All fitly spoken words are as apples of gold in baskets of silver, but figurative speech at its best is a magic glass through which man glimpses the Eternal. There is no literature in the world more rich in glorious imagery than the Bible. We find it in poet, prophet and evangelist. The teachings of Jesus are inlaid with figures, wise, suggestive and luminous. Dr. Gordon in words which both express and illustrate the glory of a vision-lit imagery says:

> There is imagery in the Psalms: "Let the sea roar and the fulness thereof," let all the trees of the field clap their hands," "thou makest the outgoings of the morning and the evening to rejoice"; as if God lifted up his face in the sunrise and glowed with the fires of his love in the sunset. Consider,

too, this image in the text, to which after so much delay I have come, "the wings of the morning." Think of this psalmist as standing on some Judean hill, looking eastward over the Judean wilderness, over the Jordan, beyond the hills of Moab, out on the illimitable desert; as he stands there he sees the sun coming up, a great bird with head of fire, breast of fire, feet of fire and wings all purple and gold; out of the infinite he sees this mystic bird speeding on its way with broader and stronger and more glorious wings; its fiery head bends with the progress of the hours toward the south; later its great eyes look toward the west; at length down in the splendour of the far sea it sinks into the unseen. What imagery! Is there anything in all literature so original, so bold, so sublime.[4]

But some one may ask "Is language of this exalted type suitable for the personal appeal which should be a part of every real sermon?" Both Atkins and Gordon in the sermons from which the illustrations are taken sound a call for individual and social righteousness. The real preacher does not stop to display his æsthetic skill, but he marches with his orient banners waving. I quote another long paragraph to illustrate this. The reader will notice that the preacher is especially searching. He will also perceive that each one of the images advances and strengthens the thought:

Nevertheless the old words of the psalmist come with an accent that is stronger and more enduring than the chatter by which the vain and shallow try to assert the modern distinction of being worthless. The trouble with the selfish lives is that the light of the supposed instincts which they imagine they can

[4] Gordon, "Revelation and the Ideal," pp. 55-56.

follow plays them false. It does not lead to any lasting satisfaction, but only entanglements, disappointments and ultimate disgust. There are men and women around us whose lives seem outwardly to have all that might make for happiness. They have wealth, leisure, social opportunity; but they are cursed with inward wretchedness. Their faces reveal it. Their own hearts know it. They have looked at life in false perspective. They need to see it in the light of God. They must measure their self-indulgence against the strong self-mastery of Jesus, their parasitic indolence against his heroic and joyous will to serve, their moody pathways of capricious impulse against the clean, firm road of conviction which he would help them build. Are there not some who listen in this place to-day who know that they belong to those whom I describe? Is it not true that you have groped in the twilight of a deliberate ungodliness, and that you find your feet now in the quicksand of bewilderment? You have sought your own self-pleasing, and it has led you round in a restless circle back to the same point of emptiness from which you started. You have tried to appropriate for yourself all the flowers of this world's richness and beauty; but blunderingly you have only trampled upon the stems that grew them, and the garden to-day is dead beneath your feet. The twilight of your disillusionment falls about you, and you do not know which way to turn. And yet you do know too. You need to turn to the light of God in the face of Jesus Christ to see his gentleness and his beauty, his high meaning for the life that so easily we make common, his better ways of dedication in which he means that you should walk.[5]

[5] Bowie W. Russell, Sermon, The Revealing Light, in "Best Sermons," edited by Joseph Fort Newton, p. 23-24.

In reading material of this kind the question arises as to how much time and energy a preacher should devote to the cultivation of the æsthetics of style. Is there a danger of his developing grace and charm at the expense of lucidity and force? There is. It is always unfortunate when a writer and speaker stresses *how* instead of *what*. More than one speaker has become an artistic futility because he has made the making of dainty verbalisms the main business of his life. In the most beautiful style there is an element of spontaneity. Sometimes phrases can be polished and repolished to such an extent that they become

> "Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null,
> Dead perfection, no more";

But this is not the special weakness of the pulpit address of our generation. Along with a tendency to forthright directness, there has developed a disdain for the beautiful. The average preacher is so afflicted with programs and budgets that he has little time to cultivate the subtler merits of prose style. There has been in many instances a tendency to vulgarize religion by dragging into the pulpit the language of the gutter. Certain types of evangelists have rather specialized in a phraseology which tends to break down all the dignity, solemnity and sanctity of a religious service. These blind leaders have had tribes of imitators and the result has meant a deterioration in the spiritualizing influence of many churches.

Once upon a time a certain preacher journeyed to the capital city of his state to hear a noted evangelist. On the occasion of this visit the speaker went through certain gyrations which ended with his throwing him-

self flat on the floor. The clerical visitor was highly impressed. The next Sunday while preaching to his own congregation the venerable, portly, clumsy brother of the cloth repeated the same performance in such a manner that upon that Sabbath a congregation was disgusted rather than edified. To imitate is dangerous.

Coarse illustration, maudlin sentiment, current catchwords, jejune slang, and other spawn of rudeness and imbecility produce only counterfeit results. The use of such expressions is very often due to an attempt at humor on the part of some one born without a grain of the salt of wit in his make-up. Only those who are super-pious and sub-intelligent demand that the preacher maintain a gravity like unto that of the beast which addressed the prophet Balaam. Great preachers like Beecher and Brooks made no effort to avoid humor. When Bishop William A. Quayle preached, a ripple of amusement would now and then sweep over the congregation at some shrewd feat of logical fencing or wise and witty interpretation of life. But humor dragged in by the hair of the head to draw grins from the groundlings makes the judicious grieve. The attempt to be funny on the part of the humorless individual suggests the descriptive lines from "Paradise Lost":

> "The unwieldy elephant,
> To make them mirth, used all his might, and wreathed
> His lithe proboscis."

The language used in the pulpit either adds to the impressiveness of a religious service or it detracts from it.

Even at the best there has been some deterioration

in the literary merit of the language of the modern pulpit. An editorial in the *Christian Century* laments the fact that, with a few notable exceptions, American sermonic literature has not been characterized by any special literary distinction. The homiletic writing of to-day is thus summarized: "Much of it has been the terse, unhesitating expression of the writer's mind. The meaning has been clear, but there has been little grace and less of charm." Nobody who knows will controvert this statement. There are few who would deny that the lack of these qualities means retrogression. Then arises the question, "How can we improve?"

One thing more remains to be said in answer to such a query. Beauty of prose style is caught rather than taught. The man who hears beautiful language is likely to speak it. If a man reads words of charm and majesty year after year, such contacts are certain to have an influence upon his own style of expression. The surest road to grace and nobility of diction is to saturate oneself with the words of the masters of English literature. The King James Version of the English Bible has been a teacher to many of the sons of genius. It made John Bunyan, unlettered tinker of Bedford, a well of noble English undefiled. Almost every page of John Ruskin is begemmed with allusions to the Book with whose words and teachings he was indoctrinated by his Scottish mother. An intensive study of the prose of Carlyle shows that the two great forces which molded his style were the Bible and Shakespeare.

It would be well-nigh impossible for a life-long student of literature to fail to catch a little of the spirit and power of those who have seen the light that

never was on land or sea. Great writers are great teachers. No man who has given days and nights to the study of Emerson will be habitually guilty of the linguistic crime of formulating sprawling, sesquipedalian sentences. He who with John Ruskin has seen the vision splendid will find it harder to sink into the mire of verbal commonplaceness. There is a contagious power latent within the thunderous eloquence of Burke, the stately majesty of Macaulay and the flaming grandeur of Carlyle. In the poets we find wit and wisdom, sunlight and shadow, strength and beauty, all enshrined in the ineffable glory of never-dying verse. The man who can say "These are my teachers" has learned not only diction but life.

# CHAPTER V

## THE INTRODUCTION

Many a sermon has been made or marred at the beginning. Sometimes a good start is half the battle. In a brief introduction the preacher must get the attention, interest and good-will of his hearers. Frequently the introduction must serve as a bridge from the text to the rest of the discourse. In many instances it is necessary for it to contain an explanation of the textual basis of the sermon. In Dr. South's sermons, the opening paragraphs mostly contain the general plan of the address. It must, of course, be taken for granted that any given introduction can not be put to every conceivable use. As the excerpts in this chapter will show, there are introductions and introductions. But the importance of this phase of a discourse is so obvious and so far-reaching that it would be almost impossible for a preacher to lay too much stress upon it. Dean Charles R. Brown thus expresses his opinion of the special care which should be taken in the preparation of the opening and closing words of a sermon:

> In my own practice, while I never use a manuscript in preaching, there are five sentences in my sermon which I always write out in advance and know by heart—the first one and the last four. I like to begin, if I can, with a sentence as good as I know how to make it, so that the first ball may be pitched, if possible, right over the plate and at the proper level. And I want to have the last four sen-

> tences definitely in mind so that I may not be left circling around in the air, like some helpless crow, flying to and fro above a rail fence where the stakes have all been sharpened. Seeking in vain for a suitable place to light.[1]

Most preachers would not make a mistake if they would commit to memory not only the last four sentences but the first four as well.

The stressing of the importance of the introduction to a sermon has caused some preachers to overdo this aspect of preparation. An introduction that is too long does not introduce. Neither should it consist of remote material dragged into the sermon for the purpose of "getting a start." A lecturer on homiletics of a generation ago was accustomed to say, "The introduction must be entirely separate from the rest of a sermon." This is an admirable statement of what it should not be. It most emphatically should not be conspicuously separated from the rest of the material. It is not necessary for the hearer to be able to say, "Here endeth the introduction." The preacher who spent a third of a sermon on Joseph with a discussion of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was guilty of bad homiletics. This is also true of the utterance at the beginning of a discourse of a few platitudes unrelated to the subject of the sermon.

Kern[2] tells of a lecturer on homiletics who asked the advice of his wife as to what he should say to his class on the subject of introduction. Her answer was, "Tell them for me that the best way to introduce a sermon is to have no introduction." Her paradox

[1] Brown, "The Art of Preaching," p. 113.
[2] Kern, "The Ministry to the Congregation," p. 332.

contains considerable wisdom. The way to begin any address is to begin. A man who is really saying something does not, as a rule, have any special difficulty in getting people to listen to him. Bishop Quayle has this to say concerning the problem of getting under way:

> The time when preachers may do as the old preachers did, take thirty minutes to introduce their discussion, to climb by slow ascent to the crescendo of their eloquence, that time is set. The time rushes, the crowd runs. The preacher must come at his theme at once. He must not deal in prolix preludes. He must leap like a man from a moving train and touch the ground on a dead run.[3]

Twenty-five typical sermons selected from a hundred preached by outstanding ministers within the past few years gives us the following information in regard to the relative length of sermons and introductions; 5000-350; 4700-500; 3250-475; 3000-275; 6250-500; 5000-700; 3250-300; 3550-80; 3750-800; 2750-150; 2500-400; 2500-170; 4250-140; 3250-750; 4750-250; 2750-600; 3750-400; 2000-100; 1750-125; 3150-130; 3200-170; 2700-250; 2420-128; 2500-225.

If these proportions show us anything they demonstrate that the sermon with an inordinately long introduction is a thing of the past. No longer is it the fashion to build the porch larger than the house. An examination of this phase of modern homiletical literature also furnishes evidence that in many sermons preached by men of unimpugnable ability in their field, the introduction is not easily differentiated from the

[3] Quayle, "The Pastor Preacher," p. 128.

rest of the material. In a volume[4] of distinguished sermons, among the preachers represented by discourses with introductions not clearly marked are Fosdick, Hillis, Charles W. Gilkey, Norwood, McKeehan, G. A. Gordon and Jenkins. Of ninety-three sermons by G. H. Morrison practically all have definite introductions. But on the other hand, a study of twenty-three sermons by Alexander Whyte brings out the fact that in fifteen of them it is hard to tell where the introduction ends and the sermon proper begins. Dr. Charles H. Parkhurst, whose sermons are in themselves an education in homiletics, does not invariably build a porch separate from the rest of the house. In Hubert H. Simpson's three noteworthy volumes, the formal introduction is almost an absent quantity. Illustrations of this type could be multiplied. Frequently this omission is not a vice but a virtue. It can be said with a high degree of assurance that a sharply differentiated introduction of the type found in Dr. South and many preachers of a later generation is not an absolute necessity. The undue emphasis of the value of a formal introduction has caused many a preacher to get a bad start because it has made him feel that under no circumstances should he say what he had to say without prefacing it with some more or less unrelated material.

Perhaps the best way to get at the idea of the right type of beginning for a sermon is to study some examples of effective introductions. Here is an opening passage which serves two purposes. It attracts the attention of the hearer and gives him some idea of the biblical background:

[4] Newton, "Best Sermons."

### The Life Beyond Life

I Cor. 15:32—"If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die."

This Corinthian church seems to have been like some delicate infant that catches all the maladies that young children are exposed to; but with the difference that this infant church suffered from all sorts of diseases at the same time. From the first chapter to the last of the Epistle the writer is dealing with what in our modern jargon we call "problems"; and they are all problems of inward disorder. The Epistle is a rich but not very pleasant study in ecclesiastical pathology; but it is something of a surprise to discover that skepticism is included among these distempers at Corinth. You do not usually associate skepticism with childhood. Childhood is the time of the happy undisciplined fancy when, as Francis Thompson says, we turn pumpkins into coaches and mice into horses. Something of that naïve credulity there was indeed at Corinth; but there was skepticism, too. Just how much there was or how deep it went, we have no means of knowing, except that there was enough of it and that it went deep enough to stir up St. Paul to the most daring, most imaginative and dramatic piece of writing in the letter.[5]

The next example is the beginning of a sermon which could have been preached without the use of the text which precedes it. This is by no means an unfavorable criticism. Many good sermons have been preached from topics rather than texts. Senator George Wharton Pepper, the only layman who has ever given the Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching, has had the temerity to suggest that in his opinion

[5] Roberts, "The Gospel at Corinth," p. 165.

"more often than not" the announcing of a text is not the most effective method of opening a sermon." [6]

Be that as it may, the taking of a text is still a generally accepted custom among preachers. In certain types of discourses the text itself does not loom as large as it does in others. In the sermon from which the following material is taken, the preacher announces a text as a statement of his topic and then proceeds with a vital discussion of his subject:

### Christian Modernism

Hebrews 12:27-29: "And this word, yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain. Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace (thankfulness) whereby we may offer service well pleasing to God with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire."

A theological war is on; the big Berthas; the poisonous gases envelop us; shock troops charge over No Man's Land, and we who would fain be noncombatants find our dugouts invaded and ourselves turned out into the trenches, threading the duckboards and dodging the "ash cans." None is sufficiently rash to prophesy when a treaty may be signed which will recast the boundaries of religious groups with which we have been familiar in our generation, nor what will remain of once familiar land marks. . . .

One difficulty of this confused modern day is that we must in many ways construct our own morality. The Bible grew up in times younger than ours; it contains principles, but we must discover and apply

[6] Pepper, "A Voice from the Crowd," p. 19.

them in conditions vastly different from those in which the book was written. It is a far cry from Mesopotamia to Los Angeles. Living is highly complicated; the soul has grown greatly in stature. Every generation must provide its own supplement to the ten commandments, and it is no small task to get the religious facts and principles of the Bible, tangled with ancient cosmology, psychology and unscientific beliefs, into the high-geared semi-scientific life of the day.[7]

The next excerpt is also taken from a topic sermon. The first sentence is unique in the way that it serves as a transition from the text to the sermon and at the same time states the subject of the address:

OUR CHANGING MORALS

Matthew 5: 17—"Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I come not to destroy, but to fulfil."

By the way of this well-known passage we approach the subject of modern morals. When the pulpit attempts to appraise current morals, the pew usually expects a gloomy account. We do not wish to be any more pessimistic than was Jesus when he dealt with social conditions strikingly similar in his own day. The master saw moral defects to be treated as a disease; he did not think to cajole his contemporaries into thinking they were entirely healthy. The master saw moral wrongs to be fought; he did not sheath his sword of criticism and say with a vacuous smile:

God's in His heaven—
All's right with the world.

[7] Guild, "The Romance of Preaching," p. 150.

Jesus was a severe critic, but an optimistic one. We indulge in no futile tributes to the "good old times." [8]

But in the history of preaching, in many of the most effective sermons, the text has been more than a starting point. It is the foundation upon which the entire structure is built. In a sermon of this type there is no question as to the method of beginning. The opening lines must invariably be an explanation of the meaning of the text. Here is an introductory paragraph of this kind:

PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST

Matthew 6: 31-33—Be not, therefore, anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.

There is need that attention be often called to the misleading phrase of the old version of this text, in which we are bidden to "take no thought" for food or raiment, instead of being admonished, as is the correct meaning of the revised version, not to be anxious, not to worry about them. Without forethought for these needs, man would be no better than the brutes—not so good as the wisest of them; but one may think of present and future needs and make judicious provision for them, without being consumed with care and anxiety concerning them; and it is this excessive solicitude which is here reproved and not any reasonable care for daily wants.

"Put first things first." That is the meaning of

[8] Sockman, "Suburbs of Christianity," p. 86.

this counsel. The main thing is to be faithful to the highest we know—the ideal; to that, everything else must be subordinate and tributary. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

It is this last phrase which I want you to consider this morning. Just how much does it mean?[9]

An entirely different kind of introduction is the sermon where the text, instead of being announced at the beginning in the usual way, is incorporated in the first or second paragraph. In seventeen of the twenty-six sermons found in Hubert L. Simpson's notable volume, "The Intention of the Soul," this method is used. It is possibly not to be recommended for all occasions, but it is, at least, refreshing for a change. In the following passage we do not have to wait long for the text, but the style of the opening sentences is such as would inspire the immediate attention of most congregations:

THE TRANSPORT WAGON

The great secret of successful journeying is to travel light. Half the discomforts and worry and uneasiness that arise are due to the care of the baggage that we take along with us. The longer and more arduous the journey undertaken, the more rigorously do we need to scrutinize the list of things with which we propose to encumber ourselves. Will the utility and service of each be worth its weight and care and room? Do we really need this, and this, and that?

Reflections like these arise in our minds when we

[9] Gladden, "The Interpreter," p. 189.

> read that "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him." . . . A box of dry bones on a wilderness march. . . . Were they worth the cost of transport? . . . Why did Moses take the bones of Joseph with him?[10]

To write a good introduction is not particularly easy. It demands the best thought and effort that one can give it. But laying down intricate rules does not make the work any easier. One text in homiletics, which was widely used a generation ago, devotes dozens of pages to enumerating the characteristics of a good introduction. On the face of the matter, it looks as though such minute directions would handicap the preacher rather than help him.

Naturally, it would be possible to give detailed advice in regard to the opening sentences of a sermon, yet the preacher can not go far astray if he keeps three aims in mind. (1) The introductory sentences must be of a type which will stimulate the attention of the hearer. In Tennyson's "Northern Farmer" (Old Style) the poet puts these words in the mouth of the old man:

> An' I hallus coom'd to's church afoor moy Sally wur dead,
> An' 'eard 'um a hummin' awaay loike a buzzard-clock ower my 'ead,
> An' I niver knaw'd whot a mean'd but I thowt a 'ad summat to saay,
> An' I thowt a said whot a owt to 'a said, an' I coom'd awaay.

Too many hearers take this attitude. If the preacher utters pious sentiments in a winning way, nothing

[10] Simpson, "The Intention of the Soul," p. 25.

more is required. Such listeners must be aroused from their mental somnolence. As a rule the preacher must get their attention at the beginning if he obtains it at all. (2) These initial thoughts must mean something. Worn-out homilies at the beginning of a sermon discourage the hearer at the start. They are productive of slumber rather than of cerebration. And this meaning must be so clear that men and women who are not in the habit of thinking can grasp it. The old rule "the known to the unknown" holds here. To begin with the unknown does not show good judgment. The attention of some of the congregation is lost. The speaker who gets a good thought expressed before he has spoken three sentences has by no means failed, even if his sermon may have some human imperfections. (3) The beginning of a sermon must advance the thought of the discourse as a whole. It must have in it the element of progress. When a preacher has spoken his first five sentences his thought should be advanced five steps.

The introduction of a sermon is of such importance that the effective preacher must make it the subject of special study. Time spent in mastering this phase of homiletics is never wasted. A good beginning, as a rule, is a prelude to a real sermon.

# CHAPTER VI

## ORGANIZATION

The first canon of the art of public speech is unity. A sermon should have at its basis one outstanding idea. An address which consists of the scattered thoughts which come to a speaker in the course of thirty minutes is a medley. A number of years ago the following school-composition was printed in a Western newspaper:

### CORN

> Corn is a very useful vegetable. If it were not for corn there would be no corn cakes with butter and molasses. Corn grows in large fields, and you plough it with a horse. There was a man who had a cornfield, and he had no horse, but he had a large and faithful wife, who took care of it, accompanied by a trusty dog, while he wrote poetry for the papers. We ought to be thankful if we have a good wife, which is much better than hanging round saloons and wasting your time in idleness. Corn is also used to feed hogs with, and can be made into cob pipes, which will make you sick if you are not accustomed to it. Let us firmly resolve that we will reform and lead a better life.

It is needless to point out that this effusion lacks unity. But an address without a subject and without a plan is no particular improvement upon this chaotic production. I once heard a speaker who was suddenly

called upon to give a ten-minute address at an educational gathering. He began without having an idea as to what he was going to say. As he spoke, one thought suggested another, although the connection between his ideas was by no means apparent to his audience. The longer he talked, the harder it was for him to find a stopping place, and it was an hour before he took his seat, after having touched divers subjects and elucidated none. Dr. Lounsbury once said, "The human mind has great capacity for resisting the introduction of knowledge." Even when a speaker does his best, there will be some in the congregation to whom his sermon has not conveyed an idea. But if he violates every law of rational pedagogy, he can be fairly certain that he has wasted the time of himself and of those who occupy the pews. Without organization of his material, no man can be a teacher of the truth of the spirit.

The first step in the organization of sermonic material is to have something to organize. Some one has said that there are two kinds of preachers, the one who has something to say and the one who has to say something. The preacher who has to grind out a topic of some kind during the week for his sermon for the next Sunday is reasonably certain to belong to the latter class. Real sermons are not made but grow. Sermon subjects that incubate in the mind for months tend to organize themselves. The subconscious will do a great deal of our work for us if we give it the chance. A well-built sermon is never the product of the spasmodic labor of a couple of hours.

There are two cogent arguments for the careful organizing of material; one is the preacher, the other the congregation. How often has a preacher had to

say at the close of a sermon, "I forgot my best point." A lapse of this kind is due not to a defect of memory but to loose reasoning. Ideas that are closely related to each other follow in natural sequence. Many a young preacher would have saved himself from disaster had he spent less time in memorizing and more in "thinking through" his material. The preacher whose sermon is arranged in the right way will not find the delivery of his discourse such a fatiguing process as it is for the one who churns his mind into a froth in a vain attempt to recall detached paragraphs and loosely connected anecdotes.

A sermon also needs to be well organized for the sake of the congregation. A logical discourse is not only easier for the preacher to remember but the congregation will be able to carry more of it away with them. The public is not tolerant. A speaker wins or loses its favor in divers fashions. Several members of a certain congregation expressed themselves as displeased with an eminent preacher who filled their pulpit one summer Sunday because he said "I fancy" too frequently. There are even yet places where sound and fury are regarded as the hallmarks of eloquence. But even untrained audiences can tell when a preacher is floundering aimlessly about and when he is developing a line of thought. A listener may become very enthusiastic over a muddle of ideas but it is the real sermon that he remembers. And a discourse without a logical progress of thought is not a sermon.

A frequent argument in the theological seminary of a generation ago was as to whether or not a sermon should have specified divisions or "heads." Concerning this question Dr. John Watson makes the following observation:

> It was once the fashion to have heads, and now it is the fashion not to have heads; but much can be said for the former way. One likes rests and points of departure.[1]

The sermon that seems to be all skeleton is a homiletical failure, but one that is simply a pulpy mass is worse. There must be a basic thought about which the rest of the material is grouped. The preacher who gives the impression of discussing the generality of things in general cannot hold the attention of his congregation. An outline is necessary whether it is obtruded or not. But the plan should be sufficiently in evidence to help the hearer find his road easily. Although sign-boards every ten feet or so would be confusing rather than helpful, the speaker should not be afraid to help his audience understand where he is taking them. The story is told of a colored preacher who was asked about his method of homiletics. He replied: "Fust, I tells them what I'se gwine to tell them; second, I tells them; and last, I tells them what I'se told them." Is not this plan, charming in its simplicity, worthy of commendation?

It would be easy, and at the same time futile, to dogmatize in regard to the methods of arranging thought. All such rhetorical rules are, of course, based on the laws of logic. According to Genung,[2] the general psychological laws of association are three; the law of contiguity, which is based on the fact that many ideas are remembered because they exist side by side; the law of similarity with its converse, the law of contrast; and the law of cause and effect. It is very

[1] Watson, John, "The Cure of Souls," p. 42.
[2] Genung, "The Working Principles of Rhetoric," p. 443.

seldom that any of these laws has an entirely independent existence. They work side by side; now it is one and then the other. It behooves the speaker or writer to keep these laws in mind. To make the sequence of the thought follow them as closely as possible is the way to make it a naturally moving current. The ignoring of them is almost certain to make the material seem disconnected and fragmentary.

If preaching were a narrative where event naturally follows event, there would be no particular problem of arrangement. Neither is it invariably an exposition where the laws of cause and effect determine the order of the material. But clear thinking is always productive of clear speaking. When one thought grows out of another thought, this relation is almost inevitably evident in the words which are used to express the ideas. If there is a text to be explained, that is logically the first task of the speaker. Then comes the application possibly to life in general and then to the particular struggles and temptations of the men and women to whom the sermon is being preached.

The title sermon of Dr. Washington Gladden's last volume, "The Interpreter," is an illustration of this method.[3] The text is I Cor. 14:13.—"Wherefore let him that speaketh in a tongue pray that he may interpret." Dr. Gladden explains what was meant by speaking with tongues in Paul's day and tells of some of its abuses, illustrating these dangers by telling of what he himself had seen in a meeting conducted in Nashville by a sect known as the Jumpers. This he does in order to show the situations with which Paul had to deal. Then Dr. Gladden is ready to explain his text. The crux of it is found in these words:

[3] Gladden, "The Interpreter," p. 3.

> Let us have no talking with tongues unless we have the interpretation following. And let every man who speaketh in a tongue pray that he may interpret. . . . The precise kind of interpretations with which Paul is dealing is not, indeed, a familiar business. To interpret what a man is saying when he himself does not know what he is saying is an enterprise to which none of us would wish to be called. . . . I do not suppose that any of us will ever be required to do any such thing as this. But interpretation of many more rational types we shall all be called to practice, and I wish to consider with you this function.

This is introductory and expository. Then the sermon proceeds as follows:

I. What is interpretation?
   a. Interpretation of self to self.
   b. Interpretation of truths of life to others.
II. Interpretation the staple of social life.
   a. The mother interprets to the child.
   b. Interpreting of work, play, love and worship.
   c. Interpreting the meaning of citizenship.
III. All of us should be interpreters.

A sermon entitled "Respectable Sin" by Dr. George H. Morrison is also illustrative of the merit of compactness. He has a central idea which is easily discernible. The mere passing mention of a truth, however, will not impress it upon the mind of the hearer. The preacher must master the principle of artistic repetition. The idea must be repeated and repeated. This, of course, does not mean that a speaker is to stand still, uttering the same words over and over again. Every so-called repetition should indicate prog-

ress. Each time the circular motion brings the idea around, it should be presented in a different aspect. There must be arguments, illustrations and applications. And whatever form the truth takes, there should be progress. Note the unified development of the thought as evidenced in this outline:

Respectable Sin. Matt. 23:27—Ye are like unto whited sepulchres.

Introduction.

I. Description of the white sepulchres of the Orient.

II. The Spiritual meaning of the figure.

The Pharisee was eminently guilty; he was also eminently respectable. I want then to speak to you this evening upon the subject of respectable sin.

Body of the sermon.

I. Respectable sin is not just secret sin.
   a. Christ's attitude illustrated when he called on the accusers of the sinful woman to look into their own lives.

II. The respectable sin primarily the sin of the middle class.

III. Severity of Christ in judging respectable sins.
   a. The reasons for this severity.
      1. Respectable sin has an unequalled power of deadening the conscience.
      2. Respectable is of all sin the most pernicious in its influence.[4]

In this sermon Dr. Morrison illustrates another point of high importance. A sermon must not only

[4] Morrison, "The Return of the Angels," p. 77.

be logical but psychological. It is well for the preacher to keep in mind the relation of the truth which he is stressing to the rest of the body of human knowledge. This, though, is not enough. He must also do his best to adjust the new truth to the experience and view-points of those to whom he is talking. An effective preacher is a teacher. He practices the laws of sound pedagogy. No learning ever takes place unless the new ideas are connected with those already in the mind of the learner. A teacher who unfolds material without taking into consideration what his pupil already knows, or does not know, is an indubitable failure. The same laws apply to preaching. In explaining religious truth, a preacher's starting point should be determined by the intellectual and spiritual status of his congregation. Among his multitudinous tasks, that of knowing his people is not the least. The sermon on "Respectable Sin" is a good example of the psychological method.

Suppose that Dr. Morrison had begun his sermon by making the statement that "respectable sin is of all sin the most pernicious." If any members of his congregation had thought the matter through, they would have agreed with him. But those of whom this would be true are few and far between. Most of an ordinary congregation would at the outset be inclined to disagree with the statement. In case they were sufficiently interested they would begin with a mental argument with the preacher. This would have the effect of making the dissent in the mind stronger and defeating the purpose of the preacher. On the other hand, a hearer following Dr. Morrison's theme as presented in the psychological manner, hardly dreams of dissenting. This method of development is especially important when the preacher is endeavoring

to emphasize an idea which conflicts with a good many of the traditional prejudices of his hearers. The real preacher talks not into vacuity but to flesh and blood men and women. He finds them where they are and guides them a few steps along the road to a larger and deeper vision of the truths of God.

Another type of sermon is the one which is purely expository. Some preachers have made a fetish of expository preaching and regard any discourse which can be thus classified as inherently superior. This attitude is obviously erroneous. There is no intrinsic virtue in a sermon's being either expository or topical. Helpful expository sermons have been preached and so have helpful topical sermons. Yet the value of the explanation of a passage of scripture and the applying of it to the life of the man of to-day cannot be minimized. It is worth our while to study the organization of a typical discourse in an exceptional searching and inspiring volume of sermons:

> Christ's Fool (I Cor. 4:10)—We are fools for Christ's sake. . . .
>
> Introduction.
>
> St. Paul had his head "well screwed on." Why did he call himself a fool?
>
> I. Some one in Corinth had called Paul a fool. But Paul was invulnerable to insult. . . . And he quietly answers: "Thank you. . . ." It was his way of turning the other cheek.
>
> II. The Corinthians were contemptuous of the Christian and were highly satisfied with themselves. Paul says: "We are treated as the scum and filth of the earth and we take it smiling."

III. In three ways the conduct of the Christians impressed others as being like clown's antics.
  a. Being reviled, they reviled not again.
  b. Being persecuted, they endured.
  c. Being defamed, they played for those who wronged them.

IV. Are we in our day willing to endure the world's taunts, insults and jeers? Were Jesus and Paul really fools, or are we?

V. The trouble with us is that we have only made a partial surrender. . . . We are trying to sit on two stools. We are trying to hold to Christ with one hand and to the world with the other; we are as a house divided against itself. . . . And so long as this tug-of-war lasts, our lives will go cancelling themselves out. Then man in the bitterness of his heart passes judgment on his life: "I have played the fool." [5]

A large volume could be filled with examples of different methods of organizing the material of a sermon. To say that one style is better than another would be to dogmatize. Many roads lead to effectiveness in the pulpit. It would, nevertheless, be fairly safe to say that the speaker who convinces men has a subject and an object. He knows where he will begin, what intellectual road he will travel and where he will end. He does not begin with Z and end with B. Breed [6] tells of an old Highland gamekeeper who said of his master that he was a good sportsman but "he scatters terribly." Disconnected divisions do not prevent this diffusion of material. Rowland Hill believed in using a variety of themes. His theory was that

[5] Roberts, "The Gospel at Corinth," p. 98.
[6] Breed, "Preparing to Preach," p. 104.

variety sustained the interest of his hearers. Phelps thus quotes his views in this regard and comments upon them:

> With a delicacy of taste equalled only by the severity of his logic, he himself compared his homiletical policy to the process of milking cows. "The Gospel is an excellent milch cow, which always gives plenty of milk, and of the best quality. I first pull at justification; then I give a pull at adoption, and afterwards a tit at sanctification; and so on till I have filled my pail with gospel milk." "Gospel milk, indeed!" We are told that the Gospel is to be preached to babes; but are calves specified? The bovine theory of preaching is not Pauline." [7]

A medley of words is not a sermon. Most congregations can recognize this. Deficient organization is the rock which has caused many a noble ecclesiastical craft to go to the bottom of the sea. No phase of the technique of preaching demands more time, attention and energy. If a preacher cannot organize his material he should do like Kipling's mongoose, "run and find out." If he consistently aims at continuity of thought he is likely to attain it. Every thought looks before and after. A preacher of ordinary logical faculties will not place the cart ahead of the horse. If he starts for a definite destination, he should not have undue trouble in finding the path that leads to it. Any preacher can avoid the most patent errors in this regard. He can refrain from regaling his congregation with illustrations which do not illustrate. There is no necessity of his dragging into his sermon

[7] Phelps, "The Theory of Preaching," p. 441.

quotations for the purpose of displaying his erudition. He can steadfastly avoid the use of material not germane to his theme. He can refrain from dawdling and travel steadily toward his goal. "Forward march" is a sound homiletical slogan.

# CHAPTER VII

## THE CONCLUSION

An appended, irrelevant conclusion is as detrimental to a sermon as a formal, unconnected introduction. This, of course, does not mean that there should be no carefully planned ending. It would be hard to stress too strongly the importance of an effective termination of a sermon.[1] Sensible people, as a rule, avoid listening to a minister who has no terminal facilities. I once heard a preacher, after he had preached forty-five minutes, make the welcome announcement, "in conclusion." The congregation gave a sigh of relief. Land was in sight. But the speaker had simply aroused false hopes. He continued almost fifteen minutes more and then said, "I must stop now." After floundering around five minutes longer he did conclude. The reason for his making a pitiable fiasco of what had many of the elements of a good sermon was the fact that he did not know how to draw his discourse to a close. If during his preparation he had prepared a few closing sentences, the debacle would not have occurred. A speaker should never begin an address without knowing how he is going to end it.

That the close of a sermon should be relevant to its general subject goes without saying. The tendency of certain cut-and-dried texts in homiletics and in rhetoric to insist on a clearly defined conclusion has caused many speakers to feel it a bounden duty to continue

[1] Cf. Quotation from C. R. Brown, p. 60.

for a few minutes after their discourse was completed. This has not made for good preaching. A fairly good rule in regard to the termini of a sermon is, "Start at the beginning and stop at the end." This sounds obvious. But it has not always been practiced. Certain formal teachings have tended to make many speakers believe that porches must be built on both sides of their homiletical edifices.

A conclusion should be dignified and impressive, but it should never be a spasm of oratory for the purpose of drawing the attention of the congregation to the eloquence of the preacher. It should, moreover, not be a marked climax. Shakespeare and other dramatists always prolonged the play for a few moments beyond the point of highest tension, the idea being that it is better for the audience to descend from the mountain-peak of emotion before leaving the theater. A sermon is much more impressively concluded if it is terminated not by a climax of oratory but by a few quiet, strong sentences.

Sometimes the repeating of the text furnishes the best possible ending. Dr. Joseph Fort Newton uses this method in the following sermon:

I Believe

Mark 9:24—Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief.

(Concluding paragraph)

> Let us go beyond the church, beyond its creeds, its rites, its dogmas, to the living Christ, and at his feet lay our ills, our woes, our doubts. At last, or soon or late, suddenly or slowly, we shall see that the hem of the human garment we clutched at is the

skirt of God himself, that the voice that spoke by the lakeside and from the cross is the human voice of the eternal—yea, and that the beauty that shone in Galilee, and which shines to-day, is the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus. "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief!" [2]

In the next example, the text is used in the closing sentences in a somewhat different way. These sentences are taken from a searching expository sermon in which the text is repeated again and again. The personal appeal at the end is but a repetition of the individual application of the text which characterizes the discourse throughout:

ABIDING IN CHRIST

John 15: 5-7—I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. . . . If ye abide in me, and my works abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

(Concluding sentences)

What are the conditions? "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you." Suppose the conditions were observed. If this interpretation of the human and the divine were an actuality: I, seeking my aim and motive and hope in the Lord, dwelling among the Lord's thoughts; my life governed by my beliefs; the Lord filling my life as air fills a chamber, breathing upon thought and purpose and feeling; if

[2] From sermon by Joseph Fort Newton published in *The Ambassador* for September, 1923.

these conditions were realized, what kind of "askings" would there be? . . . We want lofty asking, and lofty asking implies high planes of thinking, and high planes of thinking imply unbroken fellowship with Christ. "If we abide . . . ye shall ask . . . and it shall be done." And so the two fruits of abiding which I desire to emphasize are just these: fulness of life and kinship with the divine. What, then, shall be the practical outcome of this meditation? Let us begin the "abiding." In his "Novem Organum" Bacon gives utterance to a conviction which shall express the purpose of this concluding appeal: "The question whether anything can be known is to be settled not by arguing but by trying." "Abide in me." Try it; try it; and you shall find the issue in fruitful and abundant life.[3]

An interesting characteristic of Dr. Jowett's conclusion is its relation to the whole sermon. It contains a personal appeal, but the sermon would be much weaker if the only effort to make an application to the problems of daily life were made in the closing lines. The object of a conclusion is not to supply the practical element which has been notably lacking in the rest of the sermon. This characteristic should not be found merely at the end of a sermon but in all parts of it. Kern [4] calls attention to the omnipresent appeal to the individual in the addresses of D. L. Moody, and quotes from him many sentences tending to drive the thought straight home:

"Am I in communion with my Creator or out of communion?" "Do not think I am preaching to you, neighbors, but remember I am trying to speak to

[3] Jowett, "Apostolic Optimism," p. 235-236.
[4] Kern, "The Ministry to the Congregation," p. 345.

you, to every one of you, as if you were alone." "O prodigal, you may be wandering on the dark mountains of sin, but God wants you to come home." "Oh, may God bring you to that decision."

These moral searchlights are not confined to the conclusion. They are likely to flash out anywhere in the course of the address. On account of its emphatic position, a conclusion furnishes an exceptional opportunity for the sounding of the personal note. This, nevertheless, does not mean that the application of the teachings of a sermon to the battles fought in the souls of the men and women in the pews should be confined to the closing sentences of the address.

Some discourses are terminated by a clarifying summary of certain ideas which the preacher has endeavored to elucidate in the earlier part of his address. In the next example we have an illustration of this method. It is to be noted, however, that the individual application is not neglected.

### The Ampler Puritanism

(Concluding paragraph)

I Cor. 3:27—"All things are yours."

The Puritan of to-day accepts the challenging word of Paul. He believes that all things do belong to him. From his own past he uplifts the tradition of liberty, the sense of life so mastered by God that it can be trusted with liberty, and the haunting dream of beauty made Christian. From the eighteenth century he appropriates the vital meaning of the great revival, from the nineteenth century he appropriates

a consuming social passion and from the twentieth century he appropriates a new consciousness of the unity of humanity. So he creates that ampler Puritanism which is ready for the tasks of the turbulent, summoning world in which we dwell.[5]

There should be a variety of conclusions. To end invariably by quoting the text would produce a monotony which would develop into a serious homiletic weakness. Every preacher should vary his style of conclusion from Sunday to Sunday. It is easy here, as elsewhere, to fall into homiletical calf-paths. This can be readily seen by the study of certain volumes of current sermons.

As one examines recent books of sermons he gets the impression that the ending a sermon with a stanza from a hymn or some other poem is characteristic of the modern discourse. Among the preachers who do this with more or less frequency are M. S. Rice, Halford E. Luccock, C. F. Wishart, Lewis T. Guild, Edgar DeWitt Jones and F. F. Shannon. If the quotation is applicable and of an elevated type of verse, this method insures an impressive close. It should not, though, be an everyday occurrence. To conclude almost every sermon with a stanza will inevitably weaken it at the place where it should be the strongest. But the man who has learned the art of closing with a fitting quotation has mastered a lesson in homiletics which will often stand him in good stead. I quote two specimens of endings of this type. The first is at the end of an earnest and convincing plea for the primacy of the spiritual:

[5] Hough, "A Little Book of Sermons," p. 69.

### Sons of Mary and Martha

Ezekiel 1:8—They had the hands of a man under their wings.

John 11:8—Now Jesus loved Mary and her sister.

(Two concluding paragraphs)

There never was a time which called so loudly for men and women of courage and vision. The finest fruits of civilization are in danger to-day of utter destruction. And the tragedy is that this danger is wholly unnecessary. It is not any natural and inevitable danger that is threatening to sweep away civilization itself from the face of the earth. But it is wholly a condition that has arisen through ignorance, through selfishness, through narrowness, through men's inability or unwillingness to live and act as though God were in his heaven. . . .

If our vision perish, the driving power that moves the world is at a standstill. I plead then for the spirit of the sons of Mary as the dominating principle of our lives—the sons of a mother who chose the good part that shall not be taken away from her. We need the hands and we must needs be trained to use them—but always they must be under the wings. Always the splendor of God must illuminate and dominate. Forward, knights of the supreme vision!

"Trumpeter, sound for the splendor of God!

. . . . . .

Sound for the heights that our fathers trod,
When truth was truth and love was love,
With a hell beneath, but heaven above,
Trumpeter, rally us, rally us, rally us,
On to the city of God." [6]

[6] Wishart, "The God of the Unexpected," p. 102-103.

The other example also uses the words of the poet to help inspire storm-beaten, upward-climbing men and women to stand more firmly and to better fight the good fight of the spirit:

THE JUNIPER TREE

I Kings 14:4—But he himself went a day's journey to the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, it is enough; O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.

(Concluding lines)

Finally, one of the best-known prescriptions for despondency is the one God wrote in the Garden of Eden—work! Rich or poor, no man finds happiness in this world, or any other, without work. The most miserable people are the idle people. Christ said, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work," dignifying labor by his own life. The person who dedicates his life to noble work is on the pathway to earth's greatest joy. And this shall be his song:

The joy is in the doing,
Not the deed that's done;
The swift and glad pursuing,
Not the goal that's won.

The joy is in the seeing,
Not in what we see;
The ecstasy of vision,
Far and clear and free!

The joy is in the singing,
Whether heard or no;

The poet's wild, sweet rapture,
And song's divinest flow!

The joy is in the being—
Joy of life and breath;
Joy of soul triumphant,
Conqueror of death!

Is there a flaw in the marble?
Sculptor, do your best;
The joy is in the endeavor—
Leave to God the rest![7]

These examples are but a few of the many that could be given. To attempt to summarize the different possible types of conclusions would be a useless grappling with an impossible task. Homiletical works produced in the days when minute analysis was regarded as a cardinal literary virtue, have tried to do this and the result has been the writing of confusing and unreadable pages. The particular kind of conclusion which should terminate any given sermon depends upon the sermon. Possibly the surest method of gaining insight into the art of effectively concluding a discourse would be to make a special study of this phase of a score or two of recent sermons. This does not mean that older sermons are not fruitful subjects for study. They are, however, not adapted for use as models. Some years ago a college student who had been catapulted into supply work without a scintilla of homiletical training came to me with some of his troubles. His sermonic library consisted of a volume of Wesley's discourses, and he had been preaching some impossible imitations of these to a rural congre-

[7] Shannon, "The New Greatness," p. 110.

gation. He, naturally, had hard sledding. Spurgeon is another great preacher whom I have known to be used in this way to the detriment of sermon and congregation. Frederic W. Robertson and Phillips Brooks are more rewarding from a homiletical viewpoint to the preacher of to-day than most of their generation. But in the main, the young preacher must look to the outstanding pulpiteers of his own period for his practical suggestions. To learn to prepare adequate conclusions one should assiduously study this aspect of the making of a sermon and then spare no pains in putting his best knowledge into practice.

It would not take the traditional "Philadelphia lawyer" to prove that of all sections of a sermon, the last is of the greatest moment. It is mostly the goal toward which all of the other ideas lead. And even if the last part is not the culmination of a series of processes, it should be, as a rule, the most adequate expression of the fundamental idea of the address. This in itself is an argument for the utmost care in the preparation of this part of any public speech. Whether the rest of his address was carefully prepared or not, John Bright made it a rule of his political life to prepare the closing sentences of his material with the highest degree of care. Lord Brougham, in the preparation of his famous speech in defense of Queen Caroline, says that he revised his conclusion at least twenty times. Burke, in his arraignment of Warren Hastings, wrote his peroration sixteen times. A study of the orations of Cicero would furnish irrefutable evidence that the golden-mouthed Roman paid more attention to his closing sentences than to any other part of his address. If we observe a well-trained lawyer arguing before a jury, we can, without any

special strain on our attention, note how careful he is to avoid a scattering or weakening in his conclusion. In Daniel Webster's celebrated plea in the White murder case, his last two paragraphs represent the culmination of his argumentative skill and bear all the marks of a super-careful preparation. The same rule should apply to the conclusion of a sermon. As it is the most strategic part of the address, it should be the most thoroughly prepared.

"But, Doctor," said a young man to a lecturer on homiletics, "how shall we know where to put the conclusion?"

"Always place the conclusion at the end of the sermon," was the laconic answer given to the accompaniment of the laughter of the rest of the group.

The youth was not very exact or fortunate in his phraseology, but his question deserved a little more consideration. Not always does a speaker know where to place his "finally." Sometimes the time for the conclusion can be measured by the clock. The day of the inordinately lengthy sermon has gone. Dean Beebe says:

> Since the sermon is only one of many elements in public worship, all of which must coöperate to produce a designed effect, the question of its proportionate length is important. Certainly it should never take more than half the time available for the whole service. Generally it should take less. More time must be spent in careful preparation if one is to preach only twenty minutes than if forty are at his disposal. But the appreciation of the congregation will be correspondingly greater.[8]

[8] Beebe, "The Pastoral Office," p. 85.

The wisdom of such advice cannot be successfully confuted. Long-windedness is indicative of loose thinking and of a poor command of the technique of expression. Yet to say that a speaker should talk for twenty or twenty-five minutes and then deftly affix his conclusion would contravene all sound principles of oral discourse. What then determines the place of the conclusion? The answer is easy, although its application may entail some perplexities. If a man journeys from New York to Chicago, he knows that his trip has ended when he has reached the latter city. Real preaching is purposeful preaching. It has a destination. A well-knit sermon cannot very easily be cut in half. The speaker starts out with the idea of developing a definite line of thought. He works this over, adds and eliminates, tries this road and then that one, until he discovers the most direct path to his destination. Under the circumstances, he will have no difficulty in knowing when he has reached his goal. Once having arrived, there may be problems to decide. Does the material need a brief summary, or will a few skilfully turned sentences drive the thought home effectively? Is a final personal appeal needed? Would additional exhortation weaken or strengthen the sermon as a whole?

Questions like these every man must answer for himself. It will, though, be worth his while to give them time and thought and prayer. The ultimate influence of the whole thirty minutes for some members of the congregation may depend upon the impression of the closing words.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE LANGUAGE OF DEVOTION

The prayer from the pulpit is more than merely one of the "preliminaries." It is a vital part of the service. Beecher says: "He who knows how to pray for his people need not trouble to preach for them or to them." [1] A public prayer is not a declamation consisting of pious-sounding platitudes delivered in the presence of a congregation. Neither is it a case of a man's performing his own devotions in public. To "lead in prayer" means to stand before a group of people as their mouthpiece. The preacher who approaches God as a representative of scores, or perhaps hundreds, of men and women is bearing no small burden of responsibility. He must sympathetically know something of the inner lives of the men and women who are praying with him. He must be able to put into words the innermost thoughts of those who have not the language to express their heart's deepest longing and holiest aspirations.

It is a solemn moment when the preacher says, "Let us pray." There in the pews are burdened, storm-tossed men and women who, through his words, are to commune with God. Some there are, the sky of whose lives is overcast with the storm-clouds of doubt, for whom the old faith, hallowed by life's sweetest and most beautiful associations, has become an empty dream of a darkened age. There are others who have

[1] "Yale Lectures," II, p. 47.

allowed a secret sin to undermine the very foundations of their characters. In one of those pews sits a man who, year after year, has been fighting a hard but victorious fight against a subtle temptation. In another there is one who has yielded and has begun to think that "the struggle naught availeth." Hidden sorrows, lonely aspirations, weights and burdens, dangers seen and unseen must all be carried before God. When does a man shoulder a mightier responsibility?

Yet some preachers and religious teachers speak contemptuously of the value of preparation for public prayer. A prayer that is entirely impromptu is certain to be badly arranged, ill-expressed and inadequate. Its delivery will be either labored or mechanical. When a prayer becomes a matter of the repetition of jejune phrases, it ceases to inspire the spirit of worship. I have known graceless college students to count the number of times some of their professors used certain well-worn phrases in their chapel prayers. In one of the most scintillating and spiritually illumined volumes of Yale Lectures we read these words:

> Then again, I think that a preacher would do well to consider his public prayers beforehand, if he would have them what they should be. If I am asked, should he write them? I say no—much less memorize them. On special occasions let a man do what seems to him best, and let the rest of us not pick at him much. But as a general rule, it seems to me decidedly, that the wisest way for us unliturgical ministers, is to premeditate our prayers, and prearrange them in their outlines and headlands; and leave all the rest to the moment. Prearrangement secures brevity. Prearrangement and brevity

> secure thoughtfulness, and save us from the waft of accidental sidewinds as we go on in our prayer (like unforeseen and unmanageable spurts of emotion, and sudden ideas which, as being sudden, fascinate us, and swing us off into digressions of whose meanderings and outcome nobody can be sure); and prearrangement also saves us from omissions that ought not to be made.[2]

Preparation for prayer is more than a matter of phraseology. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Private prayer and spiritual meditation produce the atmosphere which lends impressiveness to public worship. The preacher who is a sympathetic pastor and knows the inner life of his people can for this reason better carry them on the wings of prayer to the throne of God. But in considering the language of devotion the more earthy aspects of prayer cannot be ignored.

A prayer is not well-expressed unless it has a definite plan. Here, as in any other type of oral discourse, there must be one central idea toward which the rest of the material can focus. The man who leads in prayer must know whither his steps are tending. A muddle of disconnected petitions, spasmodically ejaculated, does not serve the need which a congregational prayer exists to fill. Beebe[3] says that "a prayer is less a 'train of thought' than a 'train of emotions.'" This being true, it should have, not only a unified chain of thought, but there should be an emotional harmony. Irrelevant and undignified thoughts and phrases should be steadfastly eradicated. A prayer is no less devotional or spiritual because it is free from certain viola-

[2] Burton, "In Pulpit and Pew," p. 168.
[3] Beebe, "The Pastoral Office," p. 68.

tions of the canons of sound composition. The prayers which help aspiring human beings to climb to the shining table-lands of a richer spirituality are those uttered by men who realize that he who "leads in prayer" must slight no phase of his high privilege.

As in all other kinds of discourse, the power of prayer as a means of worship is not entirely detached from the language in which the thanksgivings and the petitions are expressed. Many a ministry has been handicapped because the preacher has lacked the words with which to utter the deepest and holiest emotions of those for whom he stands as a representative in the temple of prayer. What practical suggestion can be made to those handicapped in this way? First, we can recommend to them certain of the well-known manuals of prayer and devotion.[4]

Burton gives some excellent advice in regard to acquiring a command of the language of prayer:

> I wish now to speak of a few things that tend to full, various, rich, easy and right-flavored prayer, on the part of the minister leading his congregation. And first, I should advise much familiarity with the catholic liturgies—with the liturgies, I mean, of the church general. I think it is a wholesome thing to read them and study them habitually, especially for a young minister, who, as being young, has not yet formed his habits. He need not go under bondage to any of them. He need not publicly use them in form. If, at any point they savor of doctrinal or ecclesiastical theories which he ought not to accept,

[4] Burns, "A Pulpit Manual"; McComb, "A Book of Prayers"; Quayle, "The Climb to God"; Thirkield, "Service and Prayers"; Clements, "A Book of Prayers for Boys"; Beecher, "Prayers from Plymouth Pulpit"; "Dawson, "Prayer That Prevails"; Joseph, "Hearth and Altar."

> very well, let him be on his guard against them. But let him read them, again and again; and catch their devout spirit and suffuse his mind with their seemly phraseologies; and indoctrinate himself in the broad variety of their worshipful acts, and feed his imagination on their old-time precious associations, hearing in them, as he may, the voice of long-gone generations, the innumerable millions of God. They will insensibly chasten his taste, mold his style, bring his extemporaneous doings into orderliness, abate his eccentricities, and make him a man whom it will be a means of grace to be led by in public worship. That will be their tendency at least, if they are used judiciously and with discrimination.[5]

Another means of developing the type of vocabulary which gives a preacher the power to phrase fittingly his public prayers is saturating himself with the best of the literature of devotion, especially poetry. The reading and rereading, and possibly in part memorizing, of Tennyson's "In Memoriam," Milton's "Paradise Lost," Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven," Whittier's "The Eternal Goodness" and "Our Master" and other noble poems in which the truths of the life of the spirit are joined to the melody of never-dying verse will cause one's own thoughts and words to take on a little of the beauty and exaltation of those of the masters. Burton[6] says: "A profoundly scripturalized mind makes a good prayer." The book of Psalms is the noblest liturgical literature that ever emanated from the heart and mind of man. The book of Job, with its rich imageries and its grappling with the immensities, has had for generations the power to empower and

[5] Burton, "In Pulpit and Parish," p. 167.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

exalt the thoughts and ideals of the children of men. Historian, prophet, poet, philosopher, evangelist and apostle, all have written words that go straight to the heart of man. Heine says, "What a Book! Vast and wide as the world, rooted in the abysses of creation, and towering up beyond the blue secrets of heaven! Sunrise and sunset, birth and death, promise and fulfillment, the whole drama of humanity, are all in this Book." William Watson was not exaggerating when he said: "Every kind of literary magnificence is supremely exemplified in the Bible." A preacher steeped in this sublime literature as translated by the English scholars in the days of Shakespeare will have no trouble in finding words which are fitting symbols of the universal and fundamental truths that always have been, and always will be, the basis of prayer that is earnest and sincere.

A diction inspired by contact with the literature of the Bible will have the merit of simplicity. An elaborately dignified prayer is apt to be pompous. It gives the impression of being spoken *to* the congregation instead of *for* it. The most helpful prayers which have been printed are expressed in a language which combines dignity and simplicity. In our stressing of the importance of a real prayer not being an impromptu conglomeration of unorganized sentences, we must also remember that one which is over-prepared may take on an artificiality which will prevent its voicing the spiritual aspirations of some of the congregation. The preacher must remember that he is talking to God for the men and women who sit before him.

In the literature of devotion, the prayers of Henry Ward Beecher occupy a place that is almost unique. They are much longer than the petitions used in the

modern pulpit and their language is more ornate and diffuse than that which is used in our direct, matter-of-fact day. The following is typical. On account of its length it can only be given in part.

PRECIOUSNESS OF THE SANCTUARY

Our Heavenly Father, we do not draw near to thee in this place as if only here thou were to be found. Thou hast made the whole earth to be full of thee. The heavens declare thy glory and the firmament showeth thy handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech of thee, through all the years of our lives. Neither is there any place so solitary, nor any so barren, nor any so dark and sad and seemingly neglected, that thou art not to be discerned there. Thou hast written of thee in every part of this domain, and they that are instructed in thee know how to find thee everywhere.

But yet in some places we find thee more easily than in others. Thou hast made this place peculiarly dear to us, because here we have often lingered waiting for the dawn, until the day-spring came from on high. Here we have come, unable to see by the multitude of our tears, and gone away seeing all the better through them, as if thou hast made them lenses. Here we have been pressed down, burdened, and gone leaving our burdens, we know not where. We have come in heavily and gone out lighthearted indeed. When we turn back our thoughts to the many years that we have been wont to come here; when we bring to our remembrance those that aforetime have been with us, and are no more upon this side, how sacred is the place. . . . We thank thee for the memories of the sanctuary, for the experience of the sanctuary, and for all the blessedness which yet is in it or waiting for our reception. . . .

> And we pray that thou wilt teach us more and more the knowledge of ourselves, more and more the skill to extend this divine glory; more and more may we carry in our personal disposition, in our household, and through every part of our worldly business this nobler spirit of the divine nature; so may we live as perpetually to preach; so may we live that man shall be curious to know from what source we draw the inspiration of our lives, and thus seeing our good works shall be led to glorify our Father which is in heaven. . . .[7]

The following example is of a very different type. It represents the communion with God in everyday language. The traditional terminology of worship is entirely absent and all extraneous verbiage is ruthlessly eliminated.

> Give me clean hands, clean words, and clean thoughts. Help me to stand for the hard right against the easy wrong.
>
> Save me from habits that harm.
>
> Teach me to work as hard and play as fair in thy sight alone as if all the world saw. Forgive me when I am unkind, and help me to forgive those who are unkind to me.
>
> Keep me ready to help others at some cost to myself.
>
> Send me chances to do a little good every day, and to grow more like Christ. Amen.—William DeWitt Hyde.[8]

The above prayer is from a practical-minded teacher of ethics. The next is from a poet and mystic,—a lover of man and of nature, one whose words always pulsate with a radiant zest for life.

[7] Beecher, "Prayers from Plymouth Pulpit."
[8] Clements, "A Book of Prayer for Boys," p. 66.

### Walking in God's Apple Orchard with Him

My Lord and Saviour, I look across the fields and see the apple trees in bloom, and my heart thrills to know that thou art out there inhaling the fragrance, smiling on their white blossoms touched with wild-rose pink. What a lover of beauty thou art! The bloom of the apple tree is a poem, and the apple is a part of daily bread, and thou producest both. Thou givest beauty for ashes only not, as some suppose, at far removed intervals. It is a habit of thine. From the ash-heap of the soil smile out the apple blossoms with loveliness and fragrance. The ash-pit of the ground is odorless. The apple drift of bloom is sweet-scented as the gardens back of thy throne in heaven. Not from the air, not from the earth comes the perfume. It comes from thee. Thou art our great grower, and when we dully think that thou art out growing apples, lo, thou art out picking flowers for a bouquet for a sick woman's weary pillow. All orchard trees and shrubs I have noted are beautiful of blossom. The blackberry and raspberry are an arch of white-like flowers rooted in a shining stream; the strawberry has a blossom as white, surprising and lovely as a jasmine flower; pear blossoms are a bewilderment of white till after awhile the flowers appear like a scud of foam on a snowy wave blown white by the sea, and cherry blossoms are white as a seashell, and crabapple blossoms wear tints like a woman's cheek.

Thou wilt feed us, truly, but wilt decorate our table meanwhile with nosegays of thy gathering. O my Lord, whose thought has in it all loveliness, I thank thee for this spring morning sight of thy apple trees in bloom. The beauty of the Lord our God is upon me. I shall walk in his apple orchard with him what time he fingers the petals of that

lovely flower and will love thee and laud thee and rejoice in God my Saviour. Amen.—William A. Quayle.[9]

The next prayer is by Dr. George A. Gordon. On Sunday morning, January 18, 1925, Dr. Gordon preached a sermon entitled "Jesus and the Individual—Is Human Progress a Delusion?" The discourse was followed by this prayer, which terminated the service:

Infinite Father, we thank thee for all the authentic voices in human history and for all the great souls who have witnessed among the peoples of the earth to thy love for human beings, and we thank thee with all our hearts to-day for our Lord, the Lord Jesus, and we pray that we may come to him and behold ourselves in the divine mirror of his mind, with the features that we should wear, and with the character and spirit that should be ours, and the richness of life, the freedom, the song, and the power for good. We ask that as we close this service, our Father, new doors may open before each one of us into a life of spiritual affluence and peace, an unsuspected region where love reigns, where doubts never come, where the peace of God is omnipotent because his presence is everywhere.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

The following prayer by Dr. Joseph Fort Newton is also closely correlated with a sermon, but in this case it precedes the address. The subject of the sermon is "The Inn of Year's End" and the text is "Ye have not passed this way heretofore"—Joshua 3: 4.

[9] Quayle, "The Throne of Grace," p. 66.

Eternal Father, whose years are throughout all generations, how frail we are in a world that was before we were born; how fleeting in a world that will last when we are gone. Yet we are thine, thought into being by thy loving-kindness for a purpose beyond our fathoming. Humbly we who live in the house of time lift up our prayer for light and love and life eternal, seeking to know thee by what is eternal in ourselves as sparks ascending seek the sun.

Lord, as year is added unto year, may we add to our faith virtue, patience, self-control and a great love, that the longer we live on earth the better may our service be. Grant to us to be wiser to-morrow because of the failures of to-day, more trustful in the future by reason of the doubts that haunted us in the past, more forgiving because we have so much need to be forgiven. Grant us to love much, to be faithful to all, and most of all to be loyal to thy wise and holy will.

Mercifully thou hast brought us to the end of another year, though many who are nobler than we have fallen into the great white sleep—many whom we knew and loved. Let us not miss what might be done with the gift of the new year, or fail of the beautiful thing that might be made of it. Teach us to discern clearly, to walk uprightly, to endure heroically, and when days and works are done, and the house of our dwelling is dissolved in death, O receive us into the home of the soul. Amen.[10]

It can be very readily seen that all of these prayers, not even excepting that of Beecher, have a central idea, which in most instances is determined by the sub-

[10] *The Ambassador*, January, 1923.

ject of the sermon. This is especially characteristic of the concluding prayer presented in this chapter.

FOR SPIRITUALITY

My Father and my God, lead me and guide me on the dim and perilous path of life. Too long have I directed my own steps, too long have I lived without thy wisdom, stumbling in the darkness because I did not love thy light. But now I desire nothing, I need nothing but to know that thou art in me and that I am in thee.

Let the fire of thy love consume the false shows wherewith my weaker self has deceived me. Make me real as thou art real. Inspire me with a passion for righteousness and likeness to the man of Nazareth that I may love as he loved, and find my joy as he found his joy in being and doing good. Only when, like him, I am perfectly united to thee shall my life be truly alive.

Dwell thou within me to give me his courage, his tenderness, his simplicity, to transform my poor shadow-self into the likeness of his truth and strength. Amen.—Samuel McComb.[11]

It can be said with all reverence that a preacher should study these prayers and others like them in order to be better able to lead his congregation to the throne of God. The question that now faces mankind is not, "To pray or not to pray," but "How to pray." "Lord, teach us to pray" is not an inappropriate prayer for our generation. Especially do these words form a fitting supplication for one whose calling makes him a voice for the prayers of others.

[11] McComb, "Prayers for To-day," p. 121.

# CHAPTER IX

## THE TITLE

A title to a sermon is not in all instances an absolute necessity. But under most circumstances it is advisable for a preacher to designate the theme of his discourse by some fitting word or phrase. If this is not done, the sermon can hardly be announced in a church bulletin or through the current press. In fact a title is almost imperative in this day when the advertising of religious meetings has become the general custom. Moreover, the existence of a succinctly stated topic makes it easier for a preacher to catalogue his material for preservation. One would be fairly safe at this period of homiletical development in proceeding on the assumption that every sermon should have a title.

In view of the fact that there has been considerable quibbling in regard to distinctions as to the meaning of certain terms found in this chapter, I must state the ideas that I have in mind as I use them. Davis says:

> The principles on which titles and subjects are to be chosen are so nearly identical that we shall proceed to consider them together. In the vast majority of sermons there is no difference to be observed; the preacher has simply given the subject for a title. It would doubtless have been better if greater variety had been secured; but the same principles obtain in reference to both title and subject. . . . We shall

employ the word subject here in the restricted sense of "theme" or "topic," recognizing the distinctions noted above, but feeling that the current usage "sermon subject" is generally clear and that to substitute the word "theme" would confuse rather than clarify the matter.[1]

This so thoroughly accords with the principles of good usage that one could do no better than to follow the same path.

But to accomplish its purpose a title must have certain characteristics. It has been said that it should tell what the subject is and that it should make that subject as attractive as possible. In discussing the titles of special news articles, a recent popular text in the field of journalism says that they must be (1) attractive, (2) accurate, (3) concise and (4) concrete. Any sermon topic which violates one of the four requirements is to that degree defective. For example, such a title as that of Jonathan Edwards' sermon on "God's Awful Judgment in the Breaking and Withering of the Strong Rods of a Community" is not attractive, concise or concrete. The simple word "Regeneration," which Horace Bushnell once used as a subject, would be criticised as lacking in attractiveness to this generation. Thomas G. Selby's "Probation and Its Appointed Term" would be subject to the same strictures. Dr. Parkhurst's "The Healing of the Leper" is also deficient in this regard. Horace Bushnell's "The Capacity of Religion Extirpated by Disuse" is accurate but not concise. I once saw the following topic announced on a church bulletin board: "The Relation of the Church to the Problems of the Temptations of the

[1] Davis, "The Principles of Preaching," pp. 200-202.

Young Man and Woman of the Twentieth Century." This most obviously is deficient in conciseness. I was about to enter the church when I saw the subject, but I decided to hear another preacher that morning. "The Flag on the Battlements" is an attractive title, but when I heard the sermon I could not see in what way the discourse was related to its skilfully turned subject.

A preacher who, in an endeavor to make his subjects attractive to large groups, selects titles that are vulgar or grotesque will, in the long run, defeat his own purpose. There may be times when a sensational title is justified. During the war a prominent New York preacher preached a sermon on the topic "Will New York Be Destroyed if It Does Not Repent?" A title like this does something to help a preacher secure a hearing, but if the same type is used Sunday after Sunday the time speedily comes when it ceases to attract attention. If a bell is constantly rung, those in its vicinity cease to hear it. Years ago I saw a list of subjects announced by a sensational evangelist. Among them were: "To Hell for Eternity," "The Scarlet Woman," "The Wickedest Town in Pennsylvania" and "Confessions of a Converted Sinner." Such titles are repulsive to earnest and spiritually minded men and women. They tend to the vulgarizing of Christian worship.

Technical terms, as a rule, make against clearness. Terms like "Justification" and "Sanctification" as subjects are not meaningful to any but small groups. In "The Gospel of Absolution" the effectiveness of the title is spoiled by the last word. "The Governmental Theory of the Atonement" is for the same reason a badly selected subject. But every day has its own

technical terminology which it is apt to use until it is threadbare. "The Social Gospel" as a title to a sermon is unattractive and abstract to many who will read it. "Psycho-analysis and Christianity" contains a technical terms which makes it meaningless to some prospective hearers.

Next I give a number of titles which it might be profitable to criticise in the light of the principles summarized in the preceding paragraphs. The list is composed of fifty titles, selected in blocks of five, from ten notable volumes of recent sermons. No effort has been made to secure the "fifty best titles." The idea has been to present typical sermon subjects. No comment will be made upon them, but it is believed that a study of their merits and defects will be profitable to anybody interested in this phase of practical homiletics.

(1) "The Romance of Religion" (Guild).
The Costmark.
Christian Modernism.
The Masterbuilder.
Bringing up Father.
The Romance of the Stars.

(2) "The Undiscovered Country" (Atkins).
Highways in the Heart.
The Worth of a Man.
Lost Rivers.
The Power of the Upward Look.
The Otherworldly Church.

(3) "A Little Book of Sermons" (Hough).
The Man of the Hour.
The Renaissance of Religion.
The Ampler Puritanism.

The Treasure.
The Privilege of Living

(4) "The God of the Unexpected" (Wishart).
How It Strikes a Contemporary.
The Forgotten Secret of Zest.
Tracks Leading Both Ways.
Painting the White Post.
The Trajectory of Evil.

(5) "The Haunted House" (Luccock).
The Discovery of America.
The Old-time Religion.
Words Frequently Mispronounced.
The Impulse of the Resurrection.
In a World of Tangents.

(6) "God Our Contemporary" (Jowett).
Bringing Heaven to Earth.
Weather-wise but not History-wise.
Salting the Community.
Unto the Hills.
The Grace of Beneficence.

(7) "The New Greatness" (Shannon).
God in the Cornfields.
The Venture of Faith.
A Sunset Life.
The Juniper Tree.
The Higher Tones of Thanksgiving.

(8) "The Blind Spot" (Watkinson).
The Holy Triple Alliance.
Things Undone.
White Already.
The Hidden Sackcloth.
The Aim of Life.

(9) "The Intention of the Soul" (Simpson).
Abigail Voices.
The Lure of the Wilderness.
Jeremiah's Bet.
Memory and Morning.
A Shining Epitaph.

(10) "The Return of the Angels" (Morrison).
Respectable Sin.
Making Light of Sin.
The Ministries of Leisure.
The Baffling of the Spirit.
The Originality of Jesus.

# CHAPTER X

## THE BUILDING OF A VOCABULARY

"What do you read, my lord?" said the venerable Polonius to the Prince of Denmark. "Words, words, words!" contemptuously replied Hamlet.

Even though Hamlet's answer has been quoted times innumerable to prove the futility of "mere language," words are among the most tangible and powerful realities in the world. The cultivation of an accurate, broad, picturesque and forceful vocabulary is a basic factor in the obtaining of a real education. We can judge a man by his utterance. As he is, he speaks. To express oneself freely and effectively is indubitably an evidence of the possession of culture. Linguistic poverty is indicative of an impoverished mental life. No man can increase his vocabulary without at the same time growing intellectually. Language may be the garb in which we dress our thoughts, but the figure is dangerous. An appropriate vocabulary cannot be slipped on in time of need like a well-fitting garment. It is a part of the very warp and woof of one's mentality. It either detracts from the impression that an individual makes or it lends him distinction.

This, however, is not the sole argument for the cultivation of a large and correct vocabulary. The words which we use are not only revealers but instruments. Our influence upon others is always, to a large degree, dependent upon our power to use words. Sometimes the course of history has been different because

one word has been used rather than another. The result of more than one American presidential campaign has been mightily influenced by a combination of words. Hancock spoke of the tariff as a "local issue" and the phrase lost him tens of thousands of votes. In New York Dr. Burchard, speaking in favor of Blaine, let slip the words, "Rum, Romanism and Rebellion" and the result of a presidential election was changed. In 1896 the slogan "The Full Dinner-pail" proved more potent than the eloquence of Bryan. In almost any phase of activity a man's career is determined by the possession of the power to use words or the lack of it. Words are veritable masters of destinies.

They are the agents through which the business of the world is transacted. One salesman walks into a store and comes out with a big order; another one fails, although his commodity is just as saleable. Would any one deny that in cases of this kind words are frequently the determining factor? In the court-room men highly learned in the law have lost cases and prestige on account of the lack of ability to combine fifteen fitting words in the asking of a question. Students crowd into the class-room of one teacher and consistently avoid that of his colleague, the sole reason sometimes being that one can make words do his bidding and the other can not. The words that we use draw people to us or repel them. Every day the course of countless lives is molded by them. In Barrie's "Sentimental Tommy," the hero of the book upon a certain occasion floundered in speech because of his inability to find the word which he needed. Mr. Gloag, one of the examiners, expressed his disgust by saying, "It is so easy, too, to find the right word." "It's not,"

contradicted Tommy. "It is as difficult as to hit a squirrel." That Tommy was right, few would have the temerity to deny. That the acquisition of the ability to use the appropriate word is worth any effort made to develop it is one of the lessons which life itself teaches us sooner or later.

It is, nevertheless, not necessary to advance arguments as to the advisability of a preacher building a vocabulary of the right type. Words are the vehicles that carry his thought. If he lacks them, his ideas must remain unexpressed. The outstanding question in this field is "How can I enlarge my vocabulary?"

(1) The first answer comes from Mark Twain, "Study the Dictionary." A good student keeps a dictionary at his elbow. When he comes across an unfamiliar word he looks it up. He then knows how to spell it, how to pronounce it and how to use it. All of this knowledge is an absolute necessity. A schoolboy once defined a synonym as a word "used when you do not know how to spell the other one." Many a sentence has been changed and even mutilated for this reason. Sometimes exact words have been sacrificed and some of their distant cousins substituted. The inability to pronounce the word which comes to the end of a speaker's tongue has now and then caused well-constructed sentences to meet with inglorious shipwreck. It goes without saying that the man who uses a word without knowing its exact meaning is in high peril of making a spectacle of himself. Nobody can hope to increase his vocabulary without frequently recoursing to the dictionary.[1]

[1] Four outstanding dictionaries which command the respect of scholars are: "Funk and Wagnalls' New Standard Dictionary of the English Language"; "New International Dictionary of the

When a person has learned how to spell a word, how to pronounce it and how to use it, is it in his vocabulary? Can he use it when the appropriate time comes? When he needs it will it come coursing to his tongue? No, a word is never really in a man's vocabulary until he has used it. Dr. George H. Palmer in his "Self-Cultivation in English" [2] advises the one who would increase his vocabulary to deliberately learn two new words a week. That which is not expressed dies. One who would master a new word must use it as soon as possible after he has looked it up, even though he finds it necessary to drag his recent acquisition into the conversation by the hair of the head. I can best illustrate this by telling of how in my sophomore days I obeyed this rule with more or less pleasure to myself. I had come across the two words "orientation" and "exoteric." I punctiliously looked them up. But how was I going to use them? First I must put them in sentences. Why not use both in one? Fine! Carlyle's "French Revolution" stood on the shelf before me. Presto! Here is the sentence. "Carlyle's 'French Revolution' is not a good book for the orientation of the exoteric mind." Next on the program was a brief journey to the room of the man most likely to be astonished. I found him with a group of his satellites. It was hard work to work my sentence into the conversation, but after several trials, I succeeded. And more and more the wonder grew at my marvelous erudition. I use this as a rather extreme example of the methods which must be used to add new words to

English Language" (Merriman); "New Dictionary of the English Language" (Oxford University Press); "The Century Dictionary" (Century Co.).

[2] Palmer, "Self-Cultivation in English," p. 22.

the vocabulary. This, of course, does not mean that a person should specialize in the use of unfamiliar or bookish words.

> I do not advise you to con the dictionary to collect an array of high-sounding words. But, as a modern essayist has said, "You should widen your vocabulary not that you may use many or large words, but that you may use few, and those few exact for the occasion."
>
> This will result in an application of that art of omission to which I referred in a previous lecture. Highly coloured and meaningless adjectives will die a just death: redundant phrases and ambiguous expressions will be ruthlessly excised; cumbrous and cumulative sentences which only darken counsel will be discarded or at least decently chopped up. In the same way your purple passages will be revised.[3]

(2) The next advice that can be given in regard to building up a vocabulary is "Read, read, read." As a rule the language question takes care of itself if a man spends hours each day, year after year, with the great masters of literature. Very seldom does a man of limited and contracted reading exhibit any degree of skill in expression. Practice in composition without constant contact with master stylists can result in nothing but a groveling mediocrity. The masters of literature are artists in words. Contact with them cannot but give range, exactness and beauty to a man's vocabulary.

I quote a paragraph from a writer whose mastery of words has been a source of perennial joy to those who find joy in observing the fine use of language. No one

[3] Black, "The Mystery of Preaching," p. 118.

can read the following lines without finding incontrovertible evidence that its author has spent many hours upon the Parnassian heights of literature:

> If anybody cares to learn the art of putting enormous force into a few words—the knack of making language dense with meaning—Robert Browning has no superior in the art of terse, trenchant, telling speech. "Ah, the sense, the weighty sense," is often the reader's admiring exclamation. Sometimes a sentence of his is a bale of goods packed by a hydraulic press, or a trip-hammer, ponderous, quick, and crushing, or a sharp lancet, or a needle-gun, firing its compact meaning straight to the mark, or a hand grenade, small but explosive. The minister addressing drowsy audiences of work-wearied men and habitual churchgoers, blasé with much preaching, needs the power of percussive and concussive speech. If preaching be made too velvety, saccharine, and mellifluous, there is danger lest some literary auditor familiar with Gray's elegy shall find a paraphrase floating through his mind as the subtle poison of soft cushions takes effect and his heavy eyelids droop:

> Now fades yon pulpit like a glimmering landscape
> on my sight,
> And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
> Save that the beetle-headed preacher wheels his droning flight,
> And the sermon's drowsy tinklings lull the sleepy fold.

> At such moments there is need of something like "the cock's shrill clarion or the echoing horns" to rouse those "rude forefathers in their narrow" pews; and it were well if the preacher knew how in an

> emergency to reach for the trump that is to wake the dead. And we say that for rifle-crack, trumpet-blast sentences, for what some one calls "the saber-cuts of speech," for mighty, rugged, dynamic language, Robert Browning is often a masterly instructor, teaching by example.[4]

A wide reading mostly means a command of many words. Yet a passing acquaintance with literary masterpieces in all probability does not have a very deep-seated influence upon a person's language. It is the intensive study that brings the result. Five pages of Carlyle, studied and restudied until every syllable and shade of thought is mastered, is worth more than volumes superficially read. The effect of memorizing well-selected poems and passages of prose upon a man's use of language is likely to be more potent than many hours' study of the dictionary. Charles James Fox committed the entire book of Job for the purpose of improving his language. The diction of the man who memorizes the enduring works of literature has a grace, charm and vigor which is mostly lacking in that of him who neglects and minimizes this type of study.

A study of the relation between John Ruskin's early education and the superlative prose of his later years is highly illuminating. Ruskin's mother compelled him to memorize many chapters of the Bible in his childhood days. This work was done in no haphazard fashion. Every syllable had to be correct. Not a false accent was allowed to pass unrectified. Here is his own list of the chapters which he, as a child, thoroughly mastered:

[4] Kelley, "The Open Fire," pp. 64-65.

Exodus—Chapters 15th and 20th.
II Samuel—Chapters 1st from 17th verse to the end.
I Kings—Chapter 8th.
Psalms—Chapters 23rd, 32nd, 90th, 91st, 103rd, 112th, 119th, 139th.
Proverbs—Chapters 2nd, 3rd, 8th, 12th.
Isaiah—Chapter 58th.
Matthew—Chapters 5th, 6th, 7th.
Acts—Chapter 26th.
I Corinthians—Chapters 13th, 15th.
James—Chapter 4th.
Revelation—Chapters 5th, 6th.

If a young preacher desires to cultivate flexibility, grace and beauty of diction he cannot afford to neglect the intensive study and even the committing of a resonable number of literary masterpieces. There is no doubt that the memorizing of Biblical passages furnishes superlative training in the mastery of the arts of speech and that the using for this purpose of any other translation than the Authorized Version means a corresponding loss. To name the works which can be used with profit in this way would be the attempting of an impossible task. Preferences differ. One man learns better from one teacher and his friend from some one else. Lines from "Paradise Lost," from "In Memoriam," from "The Ring and the Book," and from many other emanations from mighty minds will never grow old. Bacon, Carlyle, Macaulay, Newman and Emerson can never cease to be teachers of the art of the lofty expression of sublime thoughts.

(3) Another means of developing one's vocabulary is through translating from one language to another. There are, of course, times when this method cannot be considered. It is naturally of help only to those

who are equipped for using it. Even to a self-taught linguist its benefits would be rather doubtful. But the man who never opens his foreign language books after his school days are over is allowing one of the most signal opportunities for improving his command of words to pass unused A few hours a month spent in translating from another modern language into English has a double benefit; it enables a person to keep up his reading knowledge of French or German, or whatever language he knows, and at the same time it gives him the training in verbal exactness which is obtained through correct translation.

To be of benefit to the English vocabulary a translation must be accurate. Too often teachers of foreign languages have said, "I am teaching Latin, not English," and have allowed inexact words and slovenly sentences to pass unchallenged. Such gibberish as "All Gaul is divided into parts three, one of which by the Belgae inhabited are. In their own language Celts they are called in ours Gauls" is neither Latin nor English. As far as helping to improve the English of the student the influence of such a translation is almost entirely negative. The English structure and idiom must have the right of way in the translation and the exact word should be carefully sought. I remember being in a German class in which the expression "Was für ein Mensch!" was a part of the passage being translated. As was natural in a locality tinctured with German idiom, a young lady translated it word for word, making it read "What for a man!" The teacher tersely commented, "That's the German all right; now give us the English." This particular idiom is very readily and exactly translated in the phrase, "What kind of man . . . ?" Occasionally an espe-

cially good translator can even preserve a play on words. Once in a while this is not particularly difficult. In Heine's "Die Harzreise" we find this expression, "denn die Jungen piepen, wie die Alten pfeifen." It would be hard to translate this without preserving the slight play on the words, "for the young bird peeps as the old one pipes." In Schiller's "Wallenstein" the friar is excoriating the soldiers for their excesses. He tells them that they are more concerned about the Krug (jug) than with the Krieg (war). Most of us would have been satisfied with the approximate equivalents, but one brilliant student preserved the absolute shade of meaning by rendering the first word bottle and the other battle. The man who translates accurately will in all probability speak with lucidity and exactness.

(4) A knowledge of the history of the English language will be of service to the man who is interested in the development of an extensive and accurate vocabulary. Goethe once said that a man who only knows his native tongue does not know it. Few would controvert this statement. We must not, however, interpret it to mean that the ability to make oneself understood in two or three languages means that we know them. I have seen bi-linguists and tri-linguists who could not speak any language correctly. But a knowledge of another language gives us more of an insight into our own tongue. This is truer if we have learned the second language from the ground up after we have reached years of understanding. The child who is brought up in a home where two languages are spoken does not receive this benefit. Neither does it come to the unfortunate who is sent to a "finishing school" to acquire a veneer of accomplishment to cover what is essentially ignorance. But the study of a new

language at the right time and in the right way has a high practical value.

A few hours study of the history of our language will do much to give a man a correct viewpoint. For practical purposes the best book dealing with words is "The Century Vocabulary Builder" (Greevor and Bachelor).

It should be studied with some volume giving some insight into the history of the language as "The English Language" (Smith) or "Language and Philology" (Kant). "Words and Their Ways" (Kitteridge and Greenough) and "English Words and Their Background" (McKnight) contain much intensely interesting material which would convince any one that words are worth studying on their own account. The object of such study is not primarily to increase the vocabulary but it will have that effect. To know the history of a word fixes it in the memory.

The looking up of the history of the following brief list of words will speedily convince any one of the possibilities of this field:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| anecdote | exasperate | tantalize |
| meander | dandelion | atlas |
| chimera | daisy | cologne |
| quixotic | attention | macadamize |
| curriculum | telephone | pompadour |
| sophomore | precocious | lunatic |
| philosopher | tawdry | cardinal |
| petrel | lynch | babel |
| capricious | boycott | sincere |
| bedlam | cereal | |

(5) Writing tends to develop a vocabulary which is both large and exact. The careful writer must look up words to express his thoughts; the speaker, of

necessity, must use the first word that comes to him. One who speaks much and writes little is liable to become a loose thinker. The man who has two sermons to prepare a week can possibly find the opportunity to write one of them. The object in doing this would not be for the purpose of memorizing the material but for the clarifying of the thought and the encouraging of carefulness in the use of words. I know, however, of one preacher who feels that the writing of a sermon, for some reason or other, checks the spontaneity of his utterance. Therefore, he never writes a sermon before it is delivered. If he puts his complete material on paper, he does it after he has used it in the pulpit. This man prepares his discourses with the utmost care. He talks them instead of writes them. But he sees to it that he does not neglect the discipline that comes from writing. There are few days in which he does not spend several hours at his typewriter. Some of his articles are now and then published; possibly more of them are not. But that is incidental. His object in writing them is obtained whether or not they ever see the light of day.

(6) In addition to reading in the literature of the world, every preacher naturally must keep in contact with what is written in his own field of thought. As he does this it will be of help to him to notice the prose style of various writers. Almost all of them can teach him something. From one he may learn sentence structure. Another can tell him of the art of exact expression. A third gives examples of the skilful combination of profundity of thought and simplicity of expression. There are others who can help him as he endeavors to acquire a flexible, exact and forcible vocabulary. In the following example of the

mastery of words we have a particularly skilful manipulation of the adjective:

> Dr. Fosdick spoke at the Lincoln night gathering of the church clubs. . . . While others feel dismay at the sulky, uppish mood in which America is flouting its own idealism, he is defiant, and some of his sentences flashed like zigzag lightning. Master of all the arts of speech, using jeweled phrases with inevitable ease, he made the issue of religion in our day and land startlingly vivid and compelling. Sturdy, picturesque, winsome, he is a prophet of that new note in Christianity heard by a small but gallant company of young men in all communions, who mean to preach it with gentle but relentless insistence in the days that lie ahead. He speaks as a man of insight, with the artist touch and the glow of genius. There is no fluffy prose-poetry, no perfumed and prettified art decorating a candied Christianity; but a vital mind laid against the stuff of life—virility kindled by vision and softened by that pity which is the heart of all great preaching. No man among us gives more promise of Christian leadership in a tangled time.[5]

Sometimes it is well for the student of words to read through a paragraph noticing every word and asking himself if it contains any that he has not used. In case there is, he can make an opportunity to add this word to his speaking vocabulary. Almost any good paragraph by a man who knows how to manage the English language will do for this purpose. The following may contain a few words that some of us have never utilized in our speech:

[5] Newton, "Preaching in New York," p. 37-38.

Does not every preacher know how grateful, exhilarating, even intoxicating like a draught of champagne, are the flattering compliments that come after service, and how subtly insinuating is the temptation to be satisfied with them for the moment? And then come the depression and disgust when one feels that the sermon which was honestly intended to quicken the callous conscience, bind up the broken heart and inspire the heavy spirit has all ended in a momentary gaping admiration at a futile and passing display of rhetorical and oratorical pyrotechnics. Woe unto the preacher who gets to be content with this reward for his labors. For surely this is the anti-climax in the development of the Christian minister, the lowest bathos to which he can descend—when the solemn prophet of the most high, the flaming and incarnate conscience of the community, the interpreter and ambassador of Christ God, has finally degenerated into a popular entertainer who turns the pulpit into a religious vaudeville stage and becomes an ecclesiastical song and dance artist.[6]

I add another passage for the same purpose:

Thus a man or a home or a society or a civilization is ultimately judged by the office which the ideal-making powers of life occupy in it. A family or a civilization which is rich in material possessions and poor in its appreciations belongs on the vulgar plane. A family which depends upon the creative capacity of others but does not cultivate its own highest soul capacities is vulgarizing life. After you judge a man by his salary, judge him again by his reverence for his own ideals. Our superficial civilization measures a man by his income rather than his ideals because it is easier than it would be to measure him by his

[6] Williams, "The Prophetic Ministry for To-day," p. 21.

ideals rather than his income. Even social leadership is much occupied with methods rather than meanings. An educational system which would produce spiritual civilization must subordinate vocational training and mechanical methods to the cultivation of the idealizing capacities of its youth. Creativeness and originality must be the aim of true education—the production of creative personalities. Right relationships to our ideals must be taught by our schools and become a part of the social atmosphere which we breathe every day. Great areas of smug, satisfied, vulgar, American civilization are in need of spiritual leadership and prophetic awakening. Without vision the people perish. The peril of drabness is more to be dreaded than the red peril. Education in the public schools must find a cure for this menace of deadly mechanism.[7]

[7] Youtz, "The Supremacy of the Spiritual," p. 152-153.

# CHAPTER XI

## THE LIVING WORD

In considering the language of the pulpit we can ignore no phase of the sermon. Thought and language are so indissolubly related that one cannot be considered without the other. The words in which a sermon is expressed can make it a tissue of lifeless sentences or a virile, dynamic, constructive communication from one mind and heart to another. But the preacher's choice of language is determined by the object of his sermon. "Pity 'tis, 'tis true" that more than once in the history of the Christian pulpit men have indulged in a sort of a homiletical cake-walking and have failed to preach the truths of life because they have yielded to the temptation to think more of themselves and their sermon than of the men and women before them in the pews. The preacher who thinks more about "making a hit," or "strutting his stuff," as I once heard it expressed, than he does of truths that must be spoken, of errors that should be pulverized, of men who should be pointed to the light of God, is a renegade to his highest duty.

In his early days in London, Thomas Carlyle delivered four courses of lectures culminating in the series published as "Heroes and Hero-Worship." As soon, however, as he could live without recourse to the platform he abandoned it, his reason being that the public speaker was, in his opinion, tempted to a species of insincerity. Possibly few platform men

have not at some time or other been guilty of thinking more about the impression that they were making than about the helpfulness of their address. In the long run, however, the preacher whose aim is to display rather than to help is a homiletical travesty. Dr. Denny has said that no man can at the same time glorify himself and Jesus Christ.

This, nevertheless, does not mean that the preacher should not preach sermons that are of interest to his congregation. In "The Pastor-Preacher" Bishop Quayle has a chapter entitled "The Sin of Being Uninteresting" in which he says:

> The preacher must not drowse. The preacher must never drowse. He can at least be interesting. His theme is stimulative. His purpose is the changing of the atoms of the soul so that it swings in a new circle. He has his own heart strangely hot. Love girds him. The Christ applauds him. Eternity becomes his tutor. Heaven owns him as its ambassador. With him is God well pleased. A thousand points of fire leap along the horizon of his loving thought and design. He is the barehanded smith that hammers upon the anvil of the soul. How dare he be insipid, spiritless, lacking in revelation?[1]

The preacher must not yield to the temptation to use words simply to impress his congregation with his erudition or eloquence. The story is told of an old time campaign orator who felt handicapped on account of his lack of Latin. Somebody taught him the phrase "E Pluribus Unum," which he repeated on state occasions to thundering applause. Perhaps

[1] P. 128.

there have been times when some imperfectly educated and pedantic brethren have used an obsolescent knowledge of Greek and Hebrew in much the same way. This childish and intrinsically vulgar display must be avoided as a noisome pestilence. The preacher must see to it that his language is of the kind that compels attention. *The Christian Century*[2] tells of a non-religious Yale freshman saying, "When Dean Brown talks, you can't help listening even if you try not to." A speaker who begins an address in words like these is certain to get the attention of all his audience except those so devoid of intellectual life that they never acquired the habit of listening to words from the platform:

> There was a young man once who lived with his eyes to the front. When he was nothing but a farmer's boy, he had his daydreams. He saw the sheaves in the field bowing before him, according him a place of distinction. He saw the sun, the moon, the eleven stars bowing to him as they recognized the superiority of a personal life when it was intent on the best. His feet were trudging along the narrow lanes of Palestine but his head and his heart were already touching the high places of aspiration. He would not be content with just scraping together the necessary material for a living—any pig with four legs or with two can do that—he would make his life count in the larger life of the world. He looked ahead.
>
> He began his life with a serious handicap—he was the favorite son of his father's favorite wife in that polygamous household. He received a coat of many

[2] July 23, 1925, p. 955.

> colors and other marks of distinction, so that his older brothers became jealous and hated him with all their might. There on the plain of Dothan came the chance to feed fat the ancient grudge they bore him. He was far away from his father's protection, so they stripped him of his fine coat, cast him into a pit, and then later took him out and sold him to a caravan of Midianites. The Midianites carried him into Egypt and sold him as a slave boy to the house of Potiphar. Alas for all his dreams.[3]

It might be worth while to analyze this passage to see if we can find the secret of its appeal. The characteristics of the paragraphs which we first notice are simplicity and directness. There are no obvious rhetorical devices. Most members of a congregation would listen to these opening sentences with an effortless interest, but they would not especially notice the style any more than we do the clear window glass through which we view the passing world. It is narrative—and the story is not especially modern. But from the lips of one who knows the art of story telling the Old Testament narratives are perennially new. Clear, swift-moving narrative never lacks interest. Moreover, Dean Brown uses many concrete words. Of course, not all ideas can be expressed in specific terms, but the preacher who uses only general words will not be a speaker to whom men will listen with pleasure.

Concrete diction makes for vital writing and speaking. A good writer grasps his ideas with energy and therefore uses his words with vividness. A comparison of certain general and concrete words shows how the latter produce more definite images:

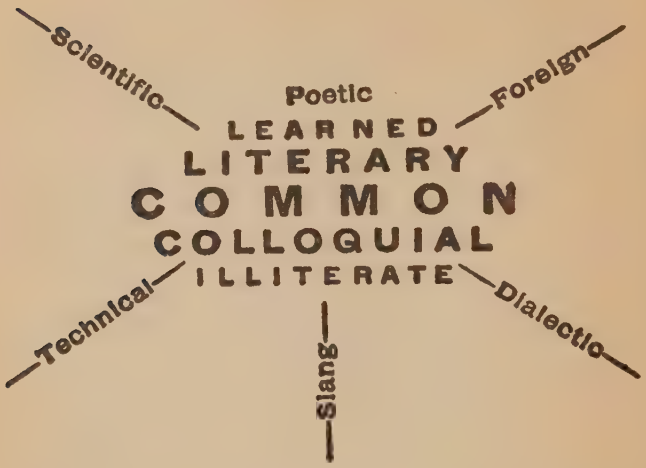
[3] Brown, "What Is Your Name?" pp. 28-29.

| General | Concrete |
|---|---|
| food— | bread, cake, rolls, pie, soup, potatoes, oranges, bananas, beets, turkey, beef, mutton, etc. |
| pleasant day— | sunny, warm, invigorating, cool, breezy. |
| tree— | maple, oak, elm, chestnut, hemlock, spruce, pine, willow, locust, birch, ash, etc. |
| get— | seize, catch, grasp, clutch, snatch, capture, arrest, procure, earn, win, etc. |
| laugh— | giggle, snicker, titter, chuckle, guffaw, cachinate, etc. |
| look— | glance, gaze, stare, peer, gape, con, pore, etc. |
| ask— | inquire, question, interrogate, interpellate, query, quiz, catechize, request, beg, solicit, entreat, beseech, implore, importune, petition, etc. |
| burn— | scorch, singe, sear, parch, char, incinerate, etc. |

The person who only uses the general term is likely to develop a vocabulary which is, to the last degree, weak and insipid.

If a speaker does this his chance of having a responsive hearing is not good. No matter how spiritually minded a preacher, no matter how broad and deep his scholarship, he cannot preach the gospel to the men of to-day if he talks in a dead language. And there are some speakers who make of their mother tongue a language as dead as any that was spoken by people long since gone.

Lathrop's "English Composition" (Century) contains the following diagram:




What part of this English vocabulary with "its clear center and its indefinite margin" ought a writer to use, or cultivate. This, of course, depends upon why and when and where the words are used. There is no question that in a paper read at a meeting of a scientific association scientific terms are entirely proper and are to be expected. At a meeting of teachers certain technical words naturally have the right of way. Almost every type of speech has its place and function. As a rule, however, the central part of the language is that which must be cultivated and used. The margin of the language, as indicated by the diagram, is not for everyday use. For example, I once attended a dinner where the majority of those present spoke both English and German. One member of the

group neither spoke nor understood a syllable of the latter language. Another understood it with some difficulty and never attempted to speak it. In this case the majority ruled rather than courtesy. Some of the party were unable to follow the conversation and others were somewhat embarrassed. The conversation should have been at the language of the center and not of the margin. A speaker should avoid the linguistic margin.

But what part of the language of the center shall he use and what part eschew? Most people will agree that "common" vocabulary is that which should be used and with it the familiar part of the language above the center, the speech of educated people. Should a public speaker ever get below the "common"? Colloquial language that is not vulgar may sometimes add to the effectiveness of a public address.

A compelling speaker mainly uses "common" speech, but he does not limit himself to it. He helps himself to all of the words of the center, barring poetic and illiterate, provided such terms are familiar in the range of his audience. Language that is literary and poetic and at the same time not obscure is not necessarily out of place in a sermon. Of course, archaic terms like *rathe, kine, lucent, tinct, yestereve, lea* and *swain* are not to be used in ordinary prose discourse. If learned and literary words are utilized, the speaker must make an effort to avoid any which on account of their being unfamiliar to his audience would build a barrier between him and them. A public speaker, for instance, who would inflict a number of esoteric philosophical terms upon a general audience would be violating an essential canon of good speaking. Dr. Watson says:

> It is a sign of weakness to shrink from the commonplace and to take refuge in fantastic originality. Any one can have an entirely new and very striking view of familiar scenery by standing on his head.[4]

The man who is too little to practice simplicity had better keep off the platform. This is particularly true of the pulpit where the man who does not preach to people in words which they can understand is depriving them of one of life's fundamental needs.

I once heard an old man say in speaking of a young preacher, "I like his preaching. He keeps at you all the time." It would have been hard to have paid a more discriminating compliment. If a man deserves such commendation, he is a real preacher. He has mastered the essential principle of sound homiletics. Teaching and preaching, in many respects, are similar. In the one as in the other, effective work involves the learning process. Here as everywhere else there can be no learning without mental activity. The new material must be connected with that already in the mind of the hearer. As the new and the old combine, the process of learning takes place. This being true, the more a speaker knows of the inner lives of those to whom he talks, the better. Sometimes, of course, conditions are such that he knows his audience only in a general way. Yet the man who has come into contact with large groups of people can act on the assumption that wherever he goes, human beings are human and that the differences between man and man are extrinsic rather than intrinsic.

> Generally unless we are dull dogs, it is a revelation to observe the interest of an audience when we

[4] Watson, "The Cure of Souls," p. 43.

> deal with the common experiences of men and women. They can "go with us," corroborate or check us in our inferences and respond to appeals that express their own undefined longings. Try to help and guide your people in the problems of their tangled life, and show them the great way out. Such preaching is of perennial interest.[5]

No sermon, though, will awaken a response in every member of the congregation. A congregation is always made up of several congregations. It consists of the old and the young, of the rich and the poor, the good and the bad, the wise and the foolish. Therefore, some sermons must apply to the specific problems in certain kinds of lives. A preacher can be so general that his sermons mean little to any one. He can be so particular that he may be "preaching at" some lone individual rather than to his congregation. At all events, he must shape his preaching to suit the character and circumstances of those who face him from the pews. That he can do this without taking the problems of language into consideration no one of normal capacity would deny. There is a fringe in every congregation without capacity to concentrate, to whom all intellectual or spiritual appeals fall upon unhearing ears. But the majority of most congregations can hear preaching and apply it, provided the preacher is preaching a living gospel in a living language.

The following paragraphs are from a sermon which sounds a personal note from beginning to end. One cannot read it without looking inside of his own life. The language is simple but exact. The thought is

[5] Black, "The Mystery of Preaching," p. 51.

placed in words which do not detract from it by calling attention to the words used to express it:

> The same thing is true of righteousness. When you think you are righteous, you are not righteous. When we think we have been acquiring righteousness when we have not, we begin to recognize the fact that we are retrograding instead of advancing.
>
> Do I then always bow in humility before every fellow-man and say I am nothing? Do I go back to the phraseology of the old-time hymnology and sing that I am a worm and worthless and grovelling on the earth? Not at all. That was a genuine expression, but it was a misconception. We do not desire to criticize it in an unwholesome or unkindly spirit. It grew out of a condition of thought that existed.
>
> God does not desire us to grovel on the earth and crawl before men as those who were worms, and say: "There is no chance for us because sin has depleted our lives and ruined our possibilities and we have no place nor home."
>
> Sin has been and is in every life; sin has been and is in every nation, and sin is the great vital reality that saps the life blood, that eats away the vitals of life. Such is sin. But sin is to be faced by manly courage, and sin is to be faced by an open frankness, and that force is the cross of Christ, and that frankness is the message of the one who lived and said: "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." [6]

If a preacher has a sympathetic understanding of his people and an earnest desire to help them, he will naturally speak in a language which will enable them to connect the truths of the sermons with their own

[6] Stone, "Places of Quiet Strength," p. 143.

experience. But there have been noble, unselfish preachers who have been impeded in their clerical usefulness because of some linguistic fault which some labor might have eradicated. Consequently the necessity of a constant effort to master the mother tongue cannot be too strongly stressed. Some years ago I came into contact with a brilliant young preacher. I enjoyed every minute that I spent in his company until he entered the pulpit. Then the racy, idiomatic, direct English which characterized his everyday speech disappeared as if by magic and in its place there came a sort of a religious dialect. His sermon was expressed in phrases long since antedated and meaning little or nothing to his congregation. In general, such a fault does not exist on the part of a man of wide reading. An old artist who for years had hoped for the success which never came, inherited a fortune. One of his first expenditures was for a trip to Europe to "see how the other fellows do it." An important step in the improving of one's language is to study different types of well-written prose. In this passage Dr. Cadman recommends the study of two master stylists in the English tongue:

> Bunyan is perhaps the most striking example, outside of the Bible, of this versatility. He abounds in body without inflation, and his simple luminous sentences are models that cannot be improved upon. Although he had no sort of academic training, his equal in clarity, brevity, felicity and wealth of expression would be hard to find. He contrived to attain a literary technique such as few men in any age have had. His unerring instinct for dramatic situations and telling phrases, combined with the splendor of his imagination, kept him altogether free from

> the heaviness and tumidity which mar so much devotional literature. Everything in his writing is warm, living, terse, ever and anon intense, yet never beyond the strict economy of emotion for practical aims. This puritan peasant of the shires devoted an emperial intellect to evangelical themes and dreamt them into a realm of power no other author of his time except Milton approached. The pompous magnificence of the able and learned divines of Bunyan's day is unendurable when compared with his vital prose. The young preacher should second his study of Bunyan by that of Lincoln, who was very much in statesmanship what Bunyan was in religion, the prophet dwelling in an interpreter's house which humanity at large has been glad to visit. No man of the nineteenth century could state a proposition with more clearness and compactness or build up an irrefutable argument with more consistency than could the victor-victim of modern democracy. His apt comparisons, inimitable wit, fundamental reasoning, logical precision, benevolence of spirit and ethical supremacy were beyond the remarkable—they were phenomenal. His principal books were the holy scriptures and Shakespeare; they gave him a culture surpassed by that of the classics and verified the assertion of Huxley that an English-speaking man who cannot get his literary style out of the sources to which Lincoln resorted is not likely to obtain it from Sophocles.

Stevenson tells that he learned to write by playing the sedulous ape to other authors. Franklin imitated Addison. Most of us would agree with Dr. Cadman in not entirely endorsing this method. But Lamb, Hazlitt, Sir Thomas Browne, De Foe, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Newman and many others used it. At all

events, a study of great authors adds freshness, charm and vividness to a man's style. There is no need of an alert-minded man going bungling through life. If there is a will to improve, it is not hard to find a way.

Another stylistic fault which can become habitual is that of indulging in a high-flown rhetoric. Such oratory was once highly popular on the college campus. In almost every college generation there were a couple of youths afflicted with the dubious gift of a fatal fluency—the ability to talk without limit and to say nothing. A passing attack of this disease may have no serious after-effects, but woe to the man who remains a "spouter" all of his days. Occasional laudatory expression: "Wasn't that fine?" "Isn't he a talker?" and "That was the best speech ever delivered in Hardscrabble Hollow," will come wafted like sweet incense to his nostrils. Yet all of such eloquence will be sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. No man will through him attain the vision of the eternal truth.

When Daniel Webster was a young man he delivered a Fourth of July oration at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. A certain editor criticised the effusion in the frank style of the days gone by and made this comment: "Here is a lot of rhetoric which is mere wording. If the speaker cannot learn to use simple and sincere language he can never be an orator for the common people." A man who cannot use "simple and sincere language" even though he might draw the applause of the unthinking is never a really effective speaker. That Webster himself did learn to use this kind of language is one of the outstanding facts in the history of the oratory of the nineteenth century. His style may in some cases impress one as being full of purple patches of "fine writing," but it is simple

and direct in comparison with that of the typical public speaker of his day. And his excellence was the result of years of effort.

Skill in speech is seldom an inherited characteristic. A young preacher heard Dr. Joseph Parker deliver an extempore sermon. After the service the young man hurried to the vestry and asked Dr. Parker whether he himself should use the same method. According to the story, Parker replied, "Young man, I wrote every word I uttered for fifteen years. When you have done what I did then, you can try what I do now." Henry Ward Beecher had a rich, pungent extemporaneous style, but he sometimes worked for hours on a sentence which was located where a sharp turn had to be made. In one of the most distinguished pastorates of recent years, the preacher told a friend that he spent five forenoons a week in the preparation of one sermon. A preacher can hardly exaggerate the significance of language in the preaching of the gospel of God's Son. He cannot devote too much time, talent and energy to making himself a master of it. Dr. Dale has written a noble passage which the preacher should not allow to pass entirely from his mind:

> . . . Your language is one of the noblest and most precious parts of that inheritance which you have received from a great ancestry. It is the living and glorious monument of the thought, the endurance, the achievements and the sorrows of many generations. It has been created by the affections and by the toil of the common people, by the genius of the orators and poets, by speculations of philosophers, by the devotions of saints. It is a legacy from your remote forefathers in the German forests whose virtues are celebrated by the severest of Roman histo-

rians. It preserves some of the most costly treasures of ancient civilizations. It is the fruit of long years of patient industry, of cruel wars, of voyages in strange seas and of travels in strange lands. It is yours, but all citizens of this great commonwealth have a property in it.[7]

[7] Dale, "Nine Lectures on Preaching," p. 179.

# APPENDIX A

## A LIST OF COMMON ERRORS

There is a danger of pedantry in the laying down of arbitrary rules in regard to the use of the English language, but the effective writer must avoid that which violates good usage. In the preparation of the following list, an effort has been made to refrain from hair-splitting. This will account for the omission of certain traditional "errors" against which rhetoricians have punctiliously warned writers for the last forty years. This list is suggestive rather than inclusive. Those desiring to make further study should have access to one of the following books: "Ball's Constructive English," (Ginn), Greevor and Jones' "Century Collegiate Handbook," (Century), or Wood's "A Collegiate Handbook of Writing," (Doubleday).

AFFECT, EFFECT. AFFECT is never used as a noun; EFFECT as a noun means result. As verbs AFFECT means To INFLUENCE and EFFECT To ACCOMPLISH.

Right: The experience affected his health.

Right: He took steps to effect a change of managers.

AGGRAVATE, EXASPERATE. AGGRAVATE means To MAKE WORSE. It is not a synonym of EXASPERATE, VEX, ANNOY or IRRITATE.

Wrong: His impudence aggravated me.

Right: The noise irritated him and aggravated his illness.

ALL-AROUND. Incorrectly used for ALL-ROUND.

ALL READY, ALREADY. ALL READY means ENTIRELY READY (adj. phrase).

ALREADY means BY THIS TIME (adverb).

Right: He had already told them that their uniforms were all ready.

ALL RIGHT. There is no such word as ALRIGHT.

ALTERNATIVE. A necessary choice of one or the other of two things.

Right: He chose the second alternative.

Wrong: He had three alternatives.

ANTHRACITE. ANTHRACITE is a noun meaning HARD COAL. Do not speak of ANTHRACITE COAL.

AWFUL. AWFUL means that which inspires one with awe.

Right: The field of battle presented an awful spectacle.

Wrong: It was awful funny.

Wrong: I am awful sorry that I lost your pencil.

BAD. After words like feel, look, smell, taste, use the adjective *bad* not the adverb *badly*.

Right: He feels bad.

BADLY. BADLY means UNSKILFULLY. Do not use it for VERY MUCH in formal writing.

Right: I should like very much to have that book.

Wrong: I want that book badly.

BOUGHTEN. A barbarism for BOUGHT.

BRAINY. Colloquial for KEEN or VIGOROUS IN MIND.

CAN, MAY. CAN means TO HAVE PERMISSION.

Wrong: Can I hand in my paper next week?

Right: May I hand in my paper next week?

CATCH. Say CATCH FIRE and not CATCH ON FIRE.

COMMENCE, BEGIN. BEGIN is preferred for ordinary occasions.

Wrong: He commenced tying the string.

Right: A thousand men commenced work yesterday on the new bridge.

CREDIBLE, CREDITABLE. CREDIBLE means BELIEVABLE; CREDITABLE means MERITORIOUS.

CUNNING. CUNNING means SKILFUL. It never means small, pretty or interesting.

Right: The carving showed cunning workmanship.

Wrong: She was a cunning baby.

CONTINUAL, CONTINUOUS. CONTINUAL means IN CLOSE SUCCESSION; CONTINUOUS means WITHOUT CESSATION.

Right: We had continual showers this week.

Right: He talked continuously for three hours.

DEMEAN. DEMEAN means behave or conduct (v).

Wrong: I would not demean myself to speak to him.

Right: He demeaned himself like a gentleman.

EMIGRATE, IMMIGRATE. EMIGRATE means TO GO OUT FROM A COUNTRY; IMMIGRATE means TO ENTER A COUNTRY.

Right: They emigrated from Ireland.

Right: They immigrated to Australia.

FIRSTLY. Not a good English word.

GOT. GOT means SECURED.

Wrong: She has got slender hands.

Right: I have at last got what I want.

HANGED, HUNG. HANGED means PUT TO DEATH BY HANGING; HUNG means SUSPENDED.

An English judge said, "Men are hanged, but beef is hung."

Wrong: He was sentenced to be hung.

HEALTHY, HEALTHFUL. HEALTHY refers to a person or thing that ENJOYS HEALTH; HEALTHFUL refers to that which PROMOTES HEALTH.

Right: A healthful climate produces a healthy population.

HONORABLE, REVEREND. (Use THE before HONORABLE and REVEREND.) Never use these titles before the surname without the Christian name or some other title.

Wrong: The Reverend Smith.

Right: The Reverend A. B. Smith.

INGENIOUS, INGENUOUS. INGENIOUS means SKILFUL, INVENTIVE; INGENUOUS means FRANK.

Right: The ingenious mechanic has made a number of useful inventions.

Right: His ingenuous disposition caused everybody to trust him.

KIND OF, SORT OF. Barbarism for somewhat.

Wrong: He is kind of lazy.

Right: He is somewhat lazy.

KIND OF A, SORT OF A. The use of the article here is unidiomatic.

Wrong: What kind of an apple is that?

Right: What kind of apple is that?

LATER ON. Sometimes used for LATER.

LAY, LIE. LAY is transitive (lay, laid, laid). LIE is intransitive (lie, lay, lain).

Right: He laid the paper on the desk.

Wrong: He laid down on the couch.

Right: He lay down on the couch.

LEARN, TEACH. LEARN means TO GAIN KNOWLEDGE; TEACH means TO IMPART KNOWLEDGE.

Wrong: The teacher does not learn the children anything.

Right: He has learned much during the past year.

LEAVE, LET. LEAVE means TO DEPART FROM; LET means TO PERMIT.

Wrong: His father would not leave him go.

Right: His father would not let him go.

LIKE, AS. LIKE is a preposition and may be used in an expression of comparison when followed by a substantive without a verb; if the substantive is followed by a verb AS must be used.

Right: He sings like a bird.

Right: He sings as a bird does.

LOAN. A noun. LOAN is now recognized as being in good use as a verb in financial language.

Right: The bank loaned him $10,000.

Wrong: He loaned me a number of books.

MAD. MAD means CRAZY; its use for angry is colloquial.

MUTUAL, COMMON. MUTUAL means RECIPROCAL; COMMON means THAT WHICH IS SHARED EQUALLY.

Right: Their love was mutual.

Right: They had a common interest in music.

Wrong: He was their mutual friend.

NICE. NICE means EXACT, SUBTLE, DISCRIMINATING.

Right: He has the ability to make nice distinctions.

Wrong: We had a nice time.

NOWHERES. There is no such word. Use NOWHERE.

O, OH. Use O in direct address; under all other circumstances use OH.

Right: O General, spare my son!

Right: Oh, I never dreamed of hearing such words from him.

OUTSIDE. OUTSIDE should not be used for BESIDES or EXCEPT.

Wrong: Nobody knows of it outside of us.

Right: Nobody knows it except us.

OUT LOUD. OUT LOUD should not be used in place of aloud.

PARTY. PARTY should not be used in reference to one person except in legal terminology.

PRINCIPLE, PRINCIPAL. PRINCIPLE means A BASIC TRUTH; PRINCIPAL refers to that which is of chief importance.

Right: He was loyal to the highest principles.

Right: He was the principal member of the firm.

PREVENTATIVE. PREVENTATIVE is frequently incorrectly used for PREVENTIVE.

SIT, SET. SIT is intransitive (sit, sat, sat). SET is transitive (set, set, set). Remember that SIT never takes an object and that SET always does.

Right: The boy sat on the deck.

Right: He set the child on the stool.

Right: The farmer sets a hen and then she sits.

STIMULUS, STIMULANT. A STIMULUS is anything that is an incentive to activity; a STIMULANT is an agent which causes a temporary activity.

Right: The book was a powerful stimulus to me at a time when I needed encouragement.

Right: He was addicted to the use of alcohol and other stimulants.

STAY, STOP. STOP should not be used for STAY.

Wrong: They are stopping at the hotel.

Right: They are staying at the hotel.

Right: He stopped at the garage as he was passing through town.

TEAM. TEAM means two or more working together. "A one-horse team" is a misnomer.

UP. Do not add UP to words like end, open, settle and finish.

UP TO DATE. A worn out phrase.

VOCATION, AVOCATION. VOCATION means AN OCCUPATION; a man's AVOCATION is his hobby.

Right: His vocation was law and his avocation golf.

WELL, GOOD. GOOD is sometimes used for WELL.

Wrong: You did that work good.

Right: You did the work well.

WOODS. Either WOODS or WOOD is correct. Watch your verbs here.

Right: The woods are beautiful.

Right: The wood is beautiful.

YOU WERE. Do not use YOU WAS for YOU WERE.

# APPENDIX B

## THE IDIOMATIC USE OF PREPOSITIONS

abatement of
abhorrence of
abound in
absolve from
abstain from
accede to
accord to (trans.)
accord with (intrans.)
adapted for (by nature, for a purpose)
adapted to (to a thing, intentionally)
addicted to a
adhere to
advanced toward
adverse to
affinity to or between
afraid of
agree to
agree with (persons)
angry at or about (things)
angry at or with (a person)
ashamed of
averse to
avoidance of
bestow upon
boast of
call for (thing)
call upon or on (a person)
careful of
careless of
coincident with
compare with
comply with
concur in (an opinion)
concur with (a person)
confer on or upon (something)
confer with (a person)
confide in (intrans.)
confide to (trans.)
conform to
congenial to
convenient to (a person)
convenient for (a purpose)
correspond with (persons)
covered with
cure of
deal in (things)
deal with (persons)
dependent on or upon
derived from
derogatory to
deserving of
desirous of
desist from
devoted to
die of (hunger, illness)

die by (violence)
die on (the battlefield)
died at (the stake)
died through (neglect)
died in (battle)
died for (mankind)
differ about (a question)
differ from (a person)
differ with (in opinion)
diminution of
disappointed in (thing secured)
disappointed of (thing not secured)
diverge from
empty of
entrust to
expert in
far from
fit for
fixed upon
free from (rules, taxes, pain, responsibility)
free with (time, money)
free in (conduct)
frighten at, by
full of
give to
independent of
inferior to
insist upon
involve in
listen to
live on or upon (food)
live by (labor, wit)
martyr for (cause)
martyr to (disease)
need of or for
obedient to
observance of
opposed to
outraged by
part from (a person)
part with (a thing)
peculiar to
penetrate into or to
persevere in
prevail upon or over
profit by
proud of
recreant to
refrain from
regardless of
replete with
resemblance to
resolve on
restrain from
secure against (the enemy)
secure from (interruption)
secure of (success
sensible of
sensitive to
similar to
subordinate to
suitable for
superior to
sympathize with
take hold of
taste for (literature)
taste of (food)
tired by (walking)
tired of (something)
tired with (action)
triumph of

triumph over
troubled about (something)
troubled with (sickness)
trust in, to
unmindful of
wait at (a place)
wait for (a person or an event)
wait upon (a person)
weary of or with
worried about, at, by
yield to
zest for

# APPENDIX C

## ERRORS IN SENTENCE STRUCTURE

### I

In some languages the meaning of a sentence is determined by the inflection of the words, but in an uninflected language like English the thought expressed is the result of the arrangement of the words. In the following sentences the defective arrangement is obvious and absurd:

Lost—On Fifth Avenue, an umbrella belonging to a gentleman with a bent rib and a bone handle.

In the game this afternoon Johnson was stunned by a blow which drew blood from a hockey-stick.

Our flat-top desks are suitable for teachers having closed backs and top rails and made both single and double.

But in the next two sentences the defective arrangement is likely to be more or less troublesome:

Grass grows in the road also.

Does this mean that grass grows in the road as well as on the lawn or does it mean that something else grew in the road in addition to the grass?

Next we have a more complicated example of the same type of error:

I can see the stacks of the steamers as they go up and down the river from my study window.

A slight change, however, eradicates the fault of this sentence:

I can see from my study window the stacks of the steamers as they go up and down the river.

The basic rule in regard to arrangements is "Place

modifiers close to the words they modify." In general, adverbs should precede the words or phrase which they govern. Note the difference in thought in the following:

I ONLY spoke to him.

I spoke ONLY to him.

## II

### DEFECTIVE REFERENCE

Everybody said that they had seen him.

None of them knew their parts.

These sentences are incorrect because words like ANYBODY, EVERYBODY, NOBODY and EVERYONE are singular and naturally should be followed by a singular pronoun as in this sentence:

Everybody did his duty.

Another type of defective reference is found in the sentence in which it is difficult to know to what antecedent the pronoun refers:

He told his friend that his debts were paid.

As the sentence stands it is absolutely impossible to know whose debts were paid. In the following sentence we have an example of an error which has been responsible for more than its share of defective sentences:

He studied his lessons faithfully which is always a good characteristic.

Here WHICH has no definite antecedent. In theory and practice among skilled writers any reference should be to a specific word:

Right: He studied the lesson which had been assigned.

## III

### DEFECTIVE CO-ORDINATION

The coördinating conjunctions AND, BUT, OR, NOR, FOR should be used to connect parts of equal grammatical value. Moreover, if they are used to join parts of dissimilar form the result will be clumsy sentences.

He was accustomed to work hard and paying his debts promptly.

In this sentence an infinitive clause "to work hard" is balanced by a participle clause "paying his debts." The result is an awkward sentence.

Right: He was accustomed to working hard and paying his debts promptly.

Here we have another example of the same fault:

He was a man of good education who also possessed great wealth.

Right: He was a man of good education and great wealth.

Wrong: We were told to take tents and that blankets and food should be taken.

Right: We were told to take tents, blankets and food.

## IV

### DEFECTIVE SUBORDINATION

The "dangling participle" is an error which should be absolutely avoided.

Wrong: Being rather careless, her work was badly neglected.

Right: Being rather careless, she neglected her work.

Wrong: Attempting to stop the car, it was run over a bank.

Right: Attempting to stop the car, he ran it over the bank.

The main thought of a sentence should be expressed in an independent clause and subordinate thoughts should be expressed in subordinate forms:

Wrong: I have a white hat and it has a black band.

Right: I have a white hat with a black band.

Wrong: He was tall and thin and he was handsome.

Right: He was tall, thin and handsome.

The use of So as a compounding conjunction is not absolutely incorrect. It is, nevertheless, responsible for much slovenly writing. Careful writers will endeavor to avoid it.

Undesirable: It rained so we did not go.

Better: As it rained we did not go.

Wrong: The hill was high and we crossed it with difficulty.

Right: The hill being high, we crossed it with difficulty.

Wrong: The church is an attractive building and it is built of stone.

Right: The church is an attractive stone building.

## V

### USE OF VERBS

A verb should agree with its subject in person and number. This phase of elementary grammar needs no discussion here. One reason why mistakes are made in this regard is carelessness in forming contractions.

Bad: He don't pay his debts.

Right: He does not (or doesn't) pay his debts.

There is also a marked tendency in many parts of the United States to make the mistake of saying "you was" for "you were." Most errors, though, in regard to the use of verbs come from the placing of too much material between the verb and its subject. This causes confusion

in regard to the subject and is responsible for the use of the wrong form of the verb.

Wrong: The general with a large army were in the city.

Right: The general with a large army was in the city.

Wrong: The floor of the room in which these machines were assembled were made of concrete.

Right: The floor of the room in which these machines were assembled was made of concrete.

## VI

### OVER-PREDICATION

The fewer verbs the better. Predication should be reduced wherever possible.

Wrong: We traveled over roads which were very rough.

Right: We traveled over very rough roads.

Wrong: We solved the problem which was complicated and puzzling.

Right: We solved the complicated and puzzling problem.

THE END

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